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ESSAYS ON

ROBERT BROWNING

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BY

MARION LITTLE

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BROWNING'S PUBLIC.

MOST of us know Tennyson's own account of his reading of Browning's *Sordello*; how there were only two lines in it that he understood, and neither of them was true; they were the opening and the closing lines:—"*Who will may hear Sordello's story told*," and "*Who would has heard Sordello's story told*"! Even the most devoted reader of Browning's poetry must laugh over this story with that sympathetic laughter which betrays that something not very unlike this has happened to him too, not once, as in the reading of Sordello, which of course is a by-word, but many times. A similar experience causes the majority of readers to resolve forthwith that they will not read anything

written by the same poet again. This, in fact, was the attitude of the reading public as a whole towards Browning's poetry for a great number of years, and is that of a large section of it to-day,—the attitude of those who have neither leisure nor patience, nor indeed inclination, to face a stubborn study; and who, in giving Browning a trial, have perhaps begun at the wrong end, and never gone on. Ask the man in the street if he likes Browning, and in nine cases out of ten he will answer that he has not the brains to understand him. Now he has the brains, but he has not the time; or else he has not wished to spend the necessary time, having no taste for solving puzzles. Mr. Swinburne, it is true, is supposed to have put to silence for ever, with one stroke of that magician's wand of his, which has in it at the same time something of the qualities of the giant's club, all those who dare to say that Browning is obscure. His brilliant protest, however, only tends to make us willing, if necessary, to surrender the word obscure, as perhaps not the fittest to describe poetry which blinds from "excess of light" rather than "any

touch of darkness," as we all very well know. And, although we may surrender it in dealing with this especial criticism, since the whole hangs upon the meaning of the word, still the world will in all probability continue to use words in their generally accepted rather than in their academic sense; and the thing which most of us mean by obscurity remains so long as people of average intelligence can read many of Browning's poems through, and at the end have no clear idea as to what the whole is about; although isolated sentences may have suggested isolated pictures or thoughts. And the cause, nature, and degree of this obscurity has nothing to say to the main question; nor has the fact that Browning's thought, when once one gets at it, is not obscure, very much to say to it; since his thought is not his poetry. For this one reason, if for no other, Browning never has been, and never will be, a popular poet. Leaving out of consideration all those who will not read poetry at all, we have again a large number who will read poetry, but not Browning's; finally, narrowing down the circle of his true public to include only those who

read and read again and love, we find that it is undeniably—the few. That this may rob him of a place among the greatest poets of the world, his most ardent admirer will willingly concede; if the ardour of his admiration has not blunted his sense of proportion, and blinded him to the value of the two-fold test by which all artists ought to be measured, —that of universality and of abidingness; but it will not rob him of his place among the poets and the great poets, nor does it in any way detract from his value to the individual who has come to value him.

The esteem in which Browning has been held has passed through many phases. First there was wide-spread neglect. A few read his poetry, and of that few still fewer praised. Nor did this soon pass away. In a letter of Mrs. Browning's, written probably in the year 1860, we find the following:—"Nobody there (in England), except a small knot of pre-Raffaelite men, pretend to do him justice. Mr. Forster has done his best—in the press. As a sort of lion, Robert has his range in society, and, for the rest, you should see Chapman's returns!" It was in this year 1860,

—a time when his powers were at their height, after he had produced *Men and Women* and *Paracelsus* and *Waring* and *The Pied Piper* and *The Flight of the Duchess* and *Pippa Passes* and *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*,—that in six months,—so we read,—his publishers did not dispose of one copy of his works. This he tells himself, not bitterly, rather with a kind of bluff simplicity, equally removed from hurt feeling and from affected carelessness. He did care; but he accepted the neglect with a kind of wonder just tinged with pity for the public, neither of which he thinks of concealing. For he knows that his poetry, taking it all in all, is worth reading; and yet he has learned by experience that the majority of Englishmen will not read it. These two facts he recognises, but does not try to reconcile; and he goes on writing all the same. "As I began, so I shall end," he writes, "—taking my own course, pleasing myself, or aiming at doing so; and thereby, I hope, pleasing God." People may read or not read; he has something to say, and he will say it.

Next we have the homage of an extended circle of those thinking people who have time

and patience; but even then some courage was necessary to profess oneself a reader of Browning, so certain was the question to follow, —"And you think you understand him?" a question the answering of which taxes one, in whatever light it may be regarded. As if one understands the blue of the sky, or the Sistine Madonna, or an Alpine peak, or the love of one's friends, or a countless number of the beautiful things with which life is crammed.

Next the appreciation of the faithful, laborious few permeated the soil around, and Browning became very generally read by true lovers of poetry. This was partly occasioned by the difficulty becoming less. For Browning preceded his age; and although he could not put himself back into the age in which he wrote, yet in time the age was bound to grow to him. This is what is still happening; for although truth is one and eternal and universal, there is such a thing as a Zeitgeist; and Browning undeniably interprets the Zeitgeist of this rather than his own age. For that which he writes about is now in the air. It greets us from the ephemeral literature of the day; an appeal

to the philosophy or the view of life of Browning strikes an answering chord in the being of most people who think at all, even those who will not be induced to read his poetry for themselves; they enter upon his thought, even though they may be repelled by his presentment of it.

But this does not mean popularity. It is true that for some time he has seemed to have a certain degree of popularity; because once it became generally acknowledged among the thinkers of the day that he had a message for the world, and that he was a poet, the same was bound to become an article of the literary creed of the many who like sheep follow a lead. Then most people under a certain age who read at all, professed themselves to be "very fond of Browning." The popularity of a few of his shorter poems went up by leaps and bounds; as, for instance, *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and *Abt Vogler*. They were quoted in sermons; people who wrote letters to the newspapers talked of "all that the world's coarse thumb and finger failed to plumb," when they were accused of not doing what they ought to have done; and in the heart of the true

Browning lover consternation and woe! And then that immortal bird, that "wings and sings." Whether it is that the rhyme is catching, or in obedience to some occult law that rules the fluctuations of popular taste, that bird has seen much service. Much as one likes him, one almost wishes that he could be laid aside for a time to enjoy a well-earned rest; and one day years hence we might hear him again take up his merry pipe, and tell the world once more that life is good.

But all this was fated to pass away, and it is, in fact, in process of passing away. The latest development of popular opinion is that of the young Oxford undergraduate, who "thinks that the Browning craze is passing over; he, for his part, infinitely prefers Wordsworth." This only means that those who read Browning because other people did, are ceasing to do so; while those who read from a natural predilection continue to read; and I believe it to be true, in spite of the testimony of the keepers of public libraries that the demand for Browning's works to-day is not so great as it was five years ago, that the circle of those who read and love is on the increase.

Throughout all this Browning has suffered perhaps more than any other poet from undiscriminating blame and from undiscriminating praise. There is a large amount of off-hand condemnation of his poetry by those who have not expended the necessary time and patience on the intelligent grasping of one poem; and who, either from hearsay, or from having actually made an attempt to read, (perhaps they have begun upon *The Red Cotton Nightcap Country*, and given the first few pages one reading), pronounce his poetry incomprehensible.

For Browning has many defects on the surface which at first sight repel the reader. Chief among them, he is undeniably obscure, as most of us understand the word. It must be said, in justice, that those who ask with a scoff, "And you understand him?" very often scoff in sincerity; for, no matter what our very clever friends say, the reading is not always easy.

This difficulty is, however, very much aggravated from two causes. One is the rooted idea that many people have, that Browning is obscure of malice prepense, and that he deliberately tries to puzzle us, with the result

that they read his poetry with a feeling of irritation not conducive to that good understanding and generous feeling of mutual confidence with which author and reader ought to meet. Browning himself has expressly denied that he tried to puzzle people, and many indications seem to point against it. His comment on the title, "Bells and Pomegranates," which he gave to a whole series of his poems, is significant. First explaining it, he adds naïvely, and evidently in all good faith, "I supposed that the bare words in such juxtaposition would convey the desired meaning"! in spite of the fact that there is never a bell and never a pomegranate mentioned otherwise than incidentally from beginning to end! One wonders how many other obscure figures and far-fetched allusions of his may have seemed to himself equally self-luminous. Again, in describing his wife's method—one smiles at the comparison, but the words illustrate the point—he writes the following: "You are quite wrong—quite wrong" (this is in answer to a friend who has remarked that she admired his poetry more than his wife's); "She has genius; I am only a painstaking fellow. Can't you

imagine a clever sort of angel, who plots and plans, and tries to build up something — he wants to make you see it as he sees it, shows you one point of view, carries you off to another, hammering into your head the thing that he wants you to understand; and whilst all this bother is going on, God Almighty turns you off a little star—that's the difference between us." There is abundant evidence in his poetry of this laborious and clumsy hammering out of a thought which points to the conclusion that in this matter he at least did his best; that his obscurity is not the obscurity of Rossetti, who sometimes, in dealing with transcendental or mystical themes, designedly expresses himself vaguely, because his thought is not clear-cut, and he does not wish that it should be; not the obscurity of William Morris who deliberately obscures the narrative of a simple incident when no purpose seems to be served by it; but rather the obscurity of one who wishes to make himself plain, but is confronted by two difficulties—the depth of his thought and his want of skill in expressing himself.

Again, there is the order in which Browning's poetry is often read. So many people

begin at the wrong end, and there are so many wrong ends to begin at. It used to be a custom among Browning prophets to advise the younger disciples, or those who aspired to discipleship, to begin with *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, because it was easiest, and at the same time a kind of test-piece by which it could be decided whether they were likely ever to become readers or not. That it is easiest is very questionable. If one is to study a whole scheme of philosophy, better study it from a big book than from a little one. It is true that the most salient points in Browning's philosophy, which elsewhere are only hinted at, or taken for granted, are made the main theme in *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and deliberately enunciated; but when one considers the wide extent of the subject, and then the length of the poem, one's brain almost reels. For he sings of God and of the soul, of immortality, of the relationship between this life and the next, of the value of the flesh, of the significance of pleasure, pain, difficulties, hindrances, and failure, all in one short poem of thirty-two stanzas! And a short summary of a great subject is always difficult,—difficult

and delusive. One so often seems to have grasped all, when only a part has been grasped. There are, it is true, various short handbooks on such subjects as Psychology, Metaphysics, and the like, which profess to go to the root of the matter; and so they do, leaving the unwary student happily browsing upon the topmost branches, and lo! he knows it not. It is always easy to seem to understand what one does not go very deeply into. The greatest hindrance which besets any searcher after realities is not so much the incapacity to see that which is within his horizon, as the lack of that subtler instinct which tells him that there are vast tracts outside of it. "I see all," so often means,—"All that I see is all."

It is much better to have no system at all in reading Browning, but to read just what attracts among the short lyrics in any volume of selections. Of these there are always some which are reasonably intelligible on the first reading, quite plain on the second. Certainly most people can read with pleasure *May and Death*, *Home Thoughts from Abroad*, *A Lost Mistress*, or *The Last Ride Together*, long

before *Rabbi Ben Ezra.* These are taken, not that they are of the same class, but because the subject matter of all is within the grasp of any ordinary intelligence, and because two of them present slight difficulties in the technique, which are characteristic of Browning's style, and which, although not the chief cause of the obscurity of Browning, are nevertheless that cause which besets one on first accosting him, that which stands in the way, and effectually bars all further progress until it is overcome. There are many people of average intelligence, unversed in Browning's style—not clever people—who will find that the following two stanzas in *A Lost Mistress* call for a second reading:—

"For each glance of that eye so bright and black,
Though I keep with heart's endeavour,—
Your voice, when you wish the snowdrops back,
Though it stay in my soul for ever!—

Yet I will but say what mere friends say,
Or only a thought stronger;
I will hold your hand but as long as all may,
Or so very little longer!"

Here the thought is simplicity itself; only the grammar of the sentence, when the stanzas are not detached in this way, is not evident at first

sight. It is well to get over some of this before attacking Browning's philosophy. The same kind of construction occurs in *Rabbi Ben Ezra* in the following passage:—

> "Not that, amassing flowers,
> Youth sighed 'Which rose make ours,
> Which lily leave and then at best recall?'
> Not that, admiring stars,
> It yearned 'Nor Jove, nor Mars;
> Mine be some figured flame which blends,
> transcends them all!'
>
> Not for such hopes and fears
> Annulling youth's brief years,
> Do I remonstrate:—"

but here both technique and thought tax one; a reason for reading the other first. This style of composition is not good,—let this be granted; but it is certain that it is a style that one can read oneself into and master; so that a reader of Browning can always arrive at this point, that however much the thought may tax him, the language is almost always comprehensible.

What remains always a stumbling-block,—repels those who do not know Browning, and is pain and grief to those who do and love him, is the roughness of his form, his unmusical lines, his grotesque rhymes, and the evident labour

with which his verse is built up. His flouting of the canons of good taste has been stigmatised even as an "impertinence." A conscious impertinence it assuredly was not. That he was careless and slovenly is belied by the fact that he spared no time and labour in equipping himself in every way possible for his work. If he chooses an historical subject, he comes to it unarmed at no point for which reading and research can arm him. It is the same with his science. Dr. Berdoe has paid a high tribute to his knowledge of the scientific subjects he deals with:—"He (Browning) is always right," he writes. "Sometimes he appears incomprehensible. One ransacks dictionaries and encyclopædias. It is they that are defective, not Browning wanting." By all this he sought to do honour to his poetic gift. But while he could fittingly equip himself at all points requiring labour and research, there were difficulties in technique, which seem to have been for him insurmountable.

True there are many passages in his poetry which one cannot but feel to have been verbally inspired; and here there is no question of technique; it drops out. Take the following:—

"Therefore to whom turn I but to Thee, the ineffable Name?
Builder and maker, Thou, of houses not made with hands!
What! have fear of change from Thee who art ever the same?
Doubt that Thy power can fill the heart that Thy power expands?"

Or again,—

"A foolish thought, and worse, perhaps!
There must be many a pair of friends
Who, arm in arm, deserve the warm
Moon-births and the long evening-ends."

Or again, in a passage widely different, where he speaks of that third, last, best part of man, which

"tending up,
Holds, is upheld by, God, and ends the man
Upward in that dread point of intercourse,
Nor needs a place, for it returns to Him."

Here, as in countless other passages, we would not have a word different; we feel that the words come of themselves, that they cannot but come, and cannot come otherwise.

But for the most part Browning's verse, even when free from worse blemishes, lacks that note of "inevitableness" which Wordsworth finds wanting in Goethe's poetry; the steps by which the construction is built up are too evident; the work throughout bears the marks

of the workman's tools. He very often seems to search laboriously for language that is "fit and fair and simple and sufficient," as he himself admirably expresses it, and the effort is writ large over the whole. And some of his greatest and noblest thoughts are expressed in language which fails in all four points. In *Christmas Eve*, for instance, there are passages which approach very near to the sublime, but which stop short of it, because suddenly one feels a great jolt in the metre, or a grotesque rhyme comes in which only provokes a smile, where a smile is out of place. All this brings us down into a region where we are compelled to think of the technique, and the finer essence of poetry evaporates; you look up, and it is gone. But that he deliberately sets aside the canons of taste is at least "not proven"; and it seems reasonable to believe that a writer who shows himself laborious on the one hand would hardly be careless and slovenly on the other. He seems to have done everything possible to arm himself with a sufficient vocabulary; the man who, on deciding to embark on the career of literature, could read the dictionary through, was capable of

anything. This one act is significant. Rossetti, we are told, used to read mediæval romances in search of "stunning" words for his poetry; and among his unpublished works a list of such words has been found. Rossetti, with his matchless technique, could well afford to turn his attention to superfluous adornments; Browning, aiming at nothing but expressing himself, tries to acquire a knowledge of his mother tongue, pure and simple. And yet it is in some of those points upon which he has expended most labour, that he fails.

And then there is that crying sin against style, not so easily defined, but which all readers of Browning know and feel, the introduction of language which belongs by right to the sphere of logical argument into passages where otherwise the language is that of pure poetry. And we feel that this is deliberately done; for so close is the connection between beauty of thought and beauty of form, that they never would have come of themselves into so alien a country. It seems as if Browning either lacked that fine instinctive feeling for form which preserves many a worse poet from such incongruities, or that,

in his anxiety to express himself, he despairingly resorts to any means rather than leave the thing unsaid. One can imagine him, in the last extremity of the hammering process he himself describes, saying at last, "I do not care how I say this, if only I can succeed in saying it at all."

The Browning lover admits all this, while he feels at the same time that Browning suffers at the hands of those who do not like him from an exaggeration of these things, and of the importance of them; so that either they never go on to get at the heart of him, or, in continuing to read, they read with a critical faculty rendered abnormally wakeful by these frequent demands upon it; and we all know that this is not the condition in which we are most open to the higher influences of art. They are tempted to forget what is the main office of the poet.

But Browning suffers also at the hands of his friends. A wicked fairy seems to have come to his christening, and decreed that he should never receive either praise or blame by measure. People generally either exalt him beyond all others, or they will have none of

him. The critics, of course, even the most friendly, are for the most part temperate in their praise; but the lay reader knows no such bounds; and one does sometimes hear Browning called our greatest English poet, our deepest thinker, the greatest religious teacher in all literature; and the great shades of Shakespeare and Dante standing by and saying never a word! What people mean by these wild statements is probably this,—that they like Browning better than any other poet; and that he has taught them more than any one else has taught them; which is a very different thing and a thing readily conceivable. We are influenced as to what we like by many circumstances, notably by mood, by the time in which we live, and by our individual needs and bent. The fact is, what we like has nothing to say to it, that is, what isolated individuals like. The universal, abiding favour of mankind has a great deal, has everything to say to it. And the favour in which Browning is held is certainly not universal; whether or not it will abide, it is idle to speculate.

That Browning has failed to catch the ear of the mob cannot be ignored. "But he is

too deep, too subtle," it is urged; "if he were shallower, he would be more popular." This sounds plausible, and is in part true, but it is fallacious. It is true that a shallow poet may catch the ear of the mob, but poets not shallow can do the same, with this difference, that the power of the one abides; that of the other does not. The shallow poet does not permanently keep his place in the heart of the mob. And if Browning does not appeal to all, it is not of necessity because he is subtle. Shakespeare was more subtle. But the man in the street in Elizabeth's reign could enjoy Shakespeare, and the man in the street can enjoy him to-day. For, no matter how deep Shakespeare may go, he never overlooks the elementary human emotions; and while he gives us a Hamlet, who defies psychological analysis, he gives us at the same time a Gonzalo and a Bassanio. Side by side with Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra, we have Hermia and Celia. And the man in the street who will never read *Paracelsus* will read *Hamlet* with pleasure; for, although the problems which perplex Hamlet are at least as deep and

complicated as anything that we find in *Paracelsus*, yet we have at the same time the play of the every-day emotions, love, hate, pity, revenge, jealousy; and this is just what makes the difference. We all remember how we read *Hamlet* when we were children, read it happily, nothing doubting; and never dreamed that there was more in it than what we saw. The condition of Hamlet's mind troubled us not at all; we did not know that there was any difficulty here; but we knew that his father was dead, and that he was very unhappy, and that he had a bad mother and a wicked uncle and a faithful friend and a true lover; further, we knew that a ghost wandered in and out of the scene in a delightfully promiscuous fashion; and how entrancingly interesting it all was! Shakespeare gives us all life; the superficial truth of things, and the deep underlying truth of things; so that the shallow and the superficial can come and find themselves mirrored there; and those who "live from a great depth of being" can come and find themselves likewise. The philosophy of Shakespeare may pass over the heads of the many; but his presentation of the story does not, and the power of the living

personality of his men and women does not; while the charm of his fine, careless, genial ease of production acts like a spell upon many who never speculate as to what it is that thus holds them, and know nothing of the depths from which it all springs. Browning, on the other hand, gives us very often only the subtle and metaphysical; and for those who cannot enter into this, there is then nothing left. Shakespeare speaks to grave and gay, to wise and foolish; Browning has no words, or few words, for the foolish; thereby placing himself in a lower rank as poet.

This he recognises himself in theory. In the mouth of Aprile, his typical poet, he places these words:—

> " . . . . For common life, its wants
> And ways, would I set forth in beauteous hues;
> The lowest hind should not possess a hope,
> A fear, but I'd be by him, saying better
> Than he his own heart's language. . .
> . . . . . nor this
> Would need a meaner spirit than the first;
> Nay, 'twould be but the self-same spirit, clothed
> In humbler guise; but still the self-same spirit;
> As one spring wind unbinds the mountain snows
> And comforts violets in their hermitage."

Wordsworth himself could not have said more. Again, when Browning wishes to give an

example of the pure spirit of poetry, which abides, its power unabated, throughout the ages, he reminds us how,—

> " . . . . . Fleet the years,
> And still the poet's page holds Helena
> At gaze from topmost Troy—'But where are they,
> My brothers, in the armament I name,
> Hero by hero? Can it be that shame
> For their lost sister holds them from the war?'—
> Knowing not they already slept afar,
> Each of them in his own dear native land."

Thus true and wide-reaching was Browning's theory of poetry. But the bent of his mind led him to feel interested rather in the complicated and the unusual than in the simple and the every-day; and consequently by far the largest part of his poetry deals with this. The one all-absorbing subject of interest to him was the development of a soul;—"Little else is worth study," he writes; and although we are all actors in this drama, the study of our parts does not interest us all. For this one reason alone Browning will never appeal to all.

In all this there is no question of popularity in the generally accepted sense of the word. There is a vicious use of the word universality, by which it is taken to mean that which

appeals to a mob of the commonplace, with the higher element of the human race left out; whereas, in its true significance, it means that which appeals to all, high as well as low, but especially the former. An appeal of this kind is the triumph of our very greatest in art. But coming next in rank are those who appeal to the finer spirit of the race only. They do not possess this quality of universality, but neither do those who appeal to the mob only. Neither can stand this test; but the former are true artists, the latter are not.

By some, who take an extreme view of the value of this quality of universality, that which fails to appeal to all is placed outside the domain of true art. Tolstoi finds it intolerable that a workman of average intelligence cannot understand an opera of Wagner's, if Wagner is to hold rank as a true musician. Tolstoi, of course, does not hold any opinion with a slack grasp; but one very often hears from others as well opinions which are a modification of this. This is not, however, the judgment of all deep thinkers. Wordsworth, in the essay which once formed the preface to the first

edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, dealing with this subject, emphatically rejects popularity as any test of a poet's work. Poetry of the best kind, he insists, must be satisfied for a season with few and scattered readers, "since there never was a period in which vicious poetry, of some kind or other, has not excited more zealous admiration, and been far more generally read than good." Does he then belittle and despise the judgment of the people? No. For all good poetry survives. "And how doth it survive but through the people? What preserves it but their intellect and wisdom?" But it must be the intellect and wisdom of one age continually corrected by that of the next. The guardians of the life of a true work of art are indeed the people, but not the people at its lowest, in a transient mood, rather that spirit of the people that abides, which ratifies in this age the decisions of the last, that great spirit of humanity, which is not of to-day, or of yesterday, or of to-morrow, but of all three:—

> " ' . . . Past and future are the wings
> On whose support, harmoniously conjoined,
> Moves the great spirit of human knowledge.'

The voice that issues from this spirit is the *vox populi* which the deity inspires." So wrote Wordsworth, the poet of "joy in widest commonalty spread."

It is well to bear all this in mind in face of the everlasting reproach brought up against Browning, and the readers of Browning, that he is the poet of the few. He is the poet of the few; and therefore he does not take his place among the greatest of all, those giants in art whom we can count on the fingers of one hand. But when we have said this, all has not been said. He is not forthwith doomed and shut out from Parnassus. He does not appeal to all; but neither does Milton, nor Wordsworth, nor Wagner, nor Turner.

Let the worst be frankly conceded. He is obscure, yes; often faulty in form, rough inharmonious, yes; his appeal is limited, yes. The Browning lover knows all about this. It is Browning himself who tells us that, although love is painted blind, he is of all most clear-sighted. Who can see blemishes so well as he who is most affected by them; and that is surely the lover. But the Browning lover is "not careful to answer in this matter." All

that the detractors say may be true. He is not in this plane; the grounds of his allegiance are elsewhere. It is as though some one attacked the colour of your friend's hair, or the house that he lives in. You may argue the point to show loyalty, and in the interests of truth and justice; you may wish that the matter were put fairly, if put at all; but the direct issue concerns you not at all; you are not in that region. What Browning is to the individual to whom he speaks of that which lives in the inmost soul, is apart from all these questions which are the main concern of the critic.

There is one test of a poet, not a test of his rank, but none the less the all important one to the individual, which Browning bears triumphantly,—can we do without him? This question will often help to keep the balance, when the fancy of the hour, or when any other surface circumstance causes us to attach a value not altogether the true one to any work of art; or when we are in danger of losing our sense of proportion when held by some powerful attraction. If some of us who love Rossetti, and who will read Rossetti when we do not want to read Shakespeare, were

asked,—which can we the better do without, *Hamlet* or *The Blessed Damozel*, if one or the other were to be wiped out as if never written? what would the answer be? It is given with no uncertain voice; yes, the Blessed Damozel, her footsteps sounding all along "the echoing stair," would recede further and further into the distance; and we should turn round to find the Dane in his place. Comparisons are always unfair and generally ungenerous, but there is this point here, we cannot do without Browning, that is, those of us who know his worth. What would happen if any dreadful choice were put before us, we cannot picture; but we are quite sure about this, we cannot let Browning go.

For Browning's supreme title of honour is that he is in the lives of many something distinctive and unique. Many people, looking back, can say that he has spoken to them as no one else has spoken; and that life and death and all things wear a different aspect for his handling. This is saying much; but many will bear me out that these are the words of truth and sobriety.

Exception may, it is true, be taken, and has been taken, to any such estimate under two

heads; one, that what he says has been said before; the other, that it is not what he says which is the main work of the poet; that to value Browning for this reason is to value him as a philosopher and a teacher, but not as a poet. The answer to the first objection answers the second also. The bald prose of much that he says has been said before. It is true that others before Browning have said,—there is a God;—man has an immortal soul;—there is an after-life;—this life is a probation;—this life is good. But Browning gives us the Seer's interpretation of these things, that is, he endeavours to give us that truest truth of them which so often eludes thought as well as language, the "breath and finer spirit" of them, if one may so apply Wordsworth's phrase. And what, after all, is the prime thing needful in a poet? Surely it is to have something to communicate which cannot be expressed except by art. If we were asked what are the three chief requirements of a poet, we should be inclined to answer,—"First, insight; secondly, insight; thirdly, insight"; did we not know that "mute inglorious Miltons" undeniably exist. We are rudely recalled to a due

recognition of earth's limitations when we are forced to remember that some vehicle for the setting forth of that which he sees is also necessary, nay, indispensable. But a thing may be indispensable, and yet of very secondary importance, when once it exists. It is humiliating to feel that the life of a man, the fate of an empire, may be decided by an accident such as the destruction of a telegraph-wire, or a mail delayed ; it is only too true that our highest aims may be frustrated by something essentially trivial ; but the trivial thing is none the less trivial for all that, and that which is of paramount importance keeps its own place. When once it is allowed that Browning has expressed himself,—not always well, it may be,—but yet expressed himself, the question of the vehicle which he has used retreats into its own place, and that a secondary one. No faults of style can rob him of his place among the poets, so long as he has communicated through art that which is otherwise incommunicable.

This brings us perilously near a well-worn controversy, to feed the flames of which Browning's poetry has supplied much fuel, that upon

the relative importance of matter and form in poetry. "The prime concern of the artist must be with his vehicle of expression," one asserts baldly. "But you must first have something to express," another urges. "True," the first returns, "but if your main concern is to express your thought, why not use the ordinary language of prose?" What does it all amount to? Is the real contention a matter of words or things? In truth, when one ranges from Aristotle's celebrated dictum,—"Poetry must possess a higher truth and a higher seriousness than prose," to Coleridge's definition,—"Poetry is that species of composition which is opposed to works of science by proposing for its *immediate* object pleasure not truth;" from Schopenhauer,—"All is a question of style now with poetry," to Ruskin,—"No weight nor mass nor beauty of execution can outweigh one grain or fragment of thought," in this Babel of tongues it is well to possess one's soul in patience, and to withdraw oneself awhile from the region of criticism, where the very air is darkened by a crowd of "words—words—words,"—strange winged creatures which change their form and colouring for every different combination in

which they are found, for every different point of view from which they are regarded, and ask oneself what one really thinks and feels; what part does poetry bear in one's own life. Perhaps Matthew Arnold's sober and balanced words come nearest to expressing that reality: —"Poetry is the most perfect speech of man,—that in which he comes nearest to being able to utter the truth;" for here he does not forget or ignore that the vehicle affects the utterance of the truth, while at the same time the utterance of the truth is the main concern of the poet, that for which the vehicle exists.

Those who insist that style is everything in poetry seem to be ignoring this—that there is an essential difference between poetry and prose, not alone in the manner in which the thing is said, but in the nature of the thing said. The prose writer records, narrates, argues, exhorts; the poet, first seeing that which all men do not see, endeavours to show this to the world; the one is the work of the intellect, the other that of the soul. It is true that, even for the poet, the intellect is pressed to the service, but the work is not primarily intellectual work. This broad distinction exists

before we touch the question of form. If a verse-writer only says that which can be said equally well in prose, however good his form may be, he is no poet.

A confusion arises through not recognising this first principle in the world of art—that there is much which one sees with the inner eye of the soul absolutely incommunicable through the ordinary language of prose, incommunicable through any medium except art, and even by art only imperfectly communicable. This must be borne in mind when we are confronted with this statement: the thought in a poem is not the poetry. Of course it is not. A thought can be expressed in prose. But when some critics say, "Browning's 'message,' so-called, must be discounted in any consideration of his rank as a poet," it is well to ask this question first: "What is the nature of the message?" If a message only means a communication addressed to the intellect, and appreciable only by the intellect, then the delivery of a message is distinctly outside the sphere of poetry. All are practically agreed as to this. But if a message can mean, as many of us use the word, something more—a subtle something

which eludes thought, and the expression of which eludes the ordinary language of every-day intercourse, something which is appreciable only by a subtler faculty than the intellect, then all art is in the truest sense a message. And when Browning, first seeing that which all men do not see, shows us this, then he is in the truest sense a poet. This act of interpretation may be done well or ill; the question of prime importance is,—is it done? Take some of those poems of Browning's in which all his worst defects congregate, and whatever their exact rank as poetry may be, they find their place in no other sphere of human activity; this is their natural home and their own place. To say that we have known all before, because all has been said before, is to say that, because we have read the old yellow book which contains the crude facts of the Franceschini murder case, we know all that *The Ring and the Book* says. To present such philosophy of life as Browning's is in any form constructed on the scientific method, and displaying as well as calling for mere hard thinking, would be to present it with

the finer essence, the *vraie vérité* of it left out. For the presentation of just this the artistic medium was absolutely necessary to Browning; but to follow this up by saying: "Discount Browning's thought, discount his message; it has all been said before," this is truly to read Browning with Browning left out; it is, as he himself would express it, "to take the film that's furled about a star for the star's self."

These two points the Browning lover is insistent upon;—the value of Browning to him lies in that which he says, not in his manner of saying it; and Browning speaks to him as a poet, not primarily as a thinker. To yield these would be to belie his own experience.

And the Browning lover goes further and asks,—has any one, indeed, in literature, among all those who, he is told, have said it all before, combined just such a profound and dominating realisation of a future life with the same keen sense of the value and significance of this; painted with so strong and yet so tender a hand the figure of that love which holds both in the hollow of

her hand; apprehended with just such a true and penetrating insight the meaning of all that baffles and hinders us here, nay, the meaning of evil itself, the need and the transitoriness of it; so pierced through the crust of outward conditions as to find the pure gold under the most unpromising exterior, in the most unexpected places? Note the marvellous touches, prodigally scattered throughout his poetry, by which he shows that, though the stars in their courses may seem to fight for the triumph of evil, yet that it is good that triumphs. Such is the spark struck from out the soul of the "polished snob" in *The Inn Album*, — a bright gleam of light which suddenly flashes before our eyes in the midst of a dreary waste of sin and falsehood:—

> "But this — this only— . . .
> I believe somehow in your purity
> Perfect as ever."

One such touch as this is to some of us worth many pages of the "felicitous" utterance of a Keats, beautiful and true as such an utterance is. The poets who show to us the soul that dwells in all beauty, perform for us no mean service; for truth is truth; there is no greater or less; "all

service ranks the same" here as elsewhere. But more powerfully operative upon the daily lives of us, who live in the midst of this mystery of evil, are the words of one who shows to us the "soul of good in things evil," of "one who . . . . never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph." In all this we cannot place the poetry of Browning in a region apart from the strong and luminous personality which is behind it all. The man who, at the age of twenty, wrote, "I believe in God and truth and love," and who, clinging to this faith unwavering for the following fifty-seven years of his life, died with the same on his lips, is a personality that must not be discounted in any estimate of his poetry; for, after all, this was the rock whence it was hewn.

It is all these things in combination which give to Browning his unique power. It is not a question of rank, or of assigning to him his proper place when measured with others; if indeed this can ever be assigned to any poet, seeing how infinite are the varieties of gifts. As we cannot compare one flower with another, nor the sea with the sky, neither can we compare one aspect of the truth with

another, and place one first, another last. And to Browning we assign no rank when we say that he has a power that is all his own. While above the gates of death he has erected a triumphal arch, inscribed with the legend,— "This is the threshold of boundless life," he shows us how, all the time, above this earth too, with all its dark places, is stretched the infinite expanse of the blue of God's own heaven.

PARACELSUS.

I.

PARACELSUS ASPIRES.

"Where'er you gazed, there stood a star!"

"I HAVE endeavoured to write a poem, not a drama," Browning writes in his preface to the earliest edition of *Paracelsus*; anticipating the adverse criticism with which his work might be met, if "judged by principles upon which it was never moulded, and subjected to a standard to which it was never meant to conform." The event has proved that one part of the apology was not necessary. Among the many sins laid to the charge of Browning by the critics of *Paracelsus*, his designed neglect of the laws of the drama has not often been brought forward. But with the words "I have endeavoured to write a poem," he claims for himself—incidentally, it is true—

that which has very often been ignored by his readers. There are, in fact, many points of interest in *Paracelsus* which lie outside the domain of poetry; as in a picture many arts of the mere draughtsman may arrest the eye, and challenge criticism. There is the question of the historical Paracelsus, of the science of the day, of the philosophy of Paracelsus, and of Browning's own philosophy; and all this has a tendency to make us forget that the whole is primarily a product not of the mind, but of the soul; that it is not an act of reason, but an act of sight; in a word, that it is a poem; and as such appeals to a subtler sense than historian, scientist, or philosopher can touch.

Throughout we see the subordinating of all else to this one aim of giving a poetical, that is, a true and deep-reaching interpretation of the subject. Take one instance of this from Browning's treatment of history. He comes to the task of writing *Paracelsus* steeped in the history of the time. This he considers the necessary preparation. But he knows that his art is something above and beyond all this. When he finds that he can better show the inner truth of the man

Paracelsus through the agency of an incident deliberately created for the purpose than in many passages of his life for which he has the warrant of history, he unhesitatingly and without apology creates the character of Aprile and the scene with Aprile. This is an example of his method throughout.

Paracelsus is the story of the life of a soul,—that mysterious thing whose motions may be swayed by reason, but which take their rise elsewhere; which manifests itself in action, but which no action fully reveals; that inner truth of a man, not that which knows, much less that which does, but that which *is*. It deals with no less a subject than life itself, and further and more particularly with the especial problems which life holds for the chosen few who are especially dowered above their fellows. For it is to those who are thus set on high that the mystery of life is deepest. The commonplace man lives all his life among supernatural things, and does not know it. The veil that hides them is impenetrable. If one day it were by chance drawn aside, he could exclaim with Jacob,—"Surely the Lord was in this place, and I knew it not . . . .

How dreadful is this place!" The sky, the sea, mountain and lake, all the marvels of the physical universe, may be to him objects of beauty, but they are not objects of wonder; they are to him what that immortal primrose was to Peter Bell, nothing more. Not that the blindest has not his moments of insight;—

> "So glorious is our nature, so august
> Man's inborn, uninstructed impulses,
> His naked spirit so majestical;"

but what come to one man in "flashes struck from midnights," in the form of dim surmisings which he is only partly conscious of, and in no wise understands, at best fleeting, leaving but little trace upon the being, are to another abiding realities. Such a man, living and moving among common things, knows that he is among supernatural things always; and all life is one great mystery—a mystery not of necessity impenetrable, for the pure in heart hold the key; but nevertheless a mystery, at once stimulating, repelling, awe-inspiring. And the main problem is surely this—how harmonise life? how reconcile our brightest visions, that which we feel in every motion of our being to be the only true and

the eternal, with all the hindrances and limitations which beset us in our every-day existence here in this work-a-day world? It is not altogether the old antagonism, between flesh and spirit, although this does enter in; nor yet that view of life as a whole which finds an inherent antagonism between this life and the next; for, even for those who most fully recognise that if man is endowed with a body as well as a soul, God gave both, and "gifts should prove their use;" even for those who most emphatically disclaim any contempt for this life, any looking upon it as "a make-shift, a mere foil, how fair so ever, to some fine life to come," the question comes up again and again—how harmonise life? How can one reconcile the insufficiency of life here even at its best, our half lights, ineffectual strivings, constant failures to realise in its perfection even the smallest good, with life's possibilities, and the high destiny of man, body and soul?

To Paracelsus at nineteen the problem was insoluble; it was not, he judged, meant to be solved. It was vain to attempt to reconcile things inherently antagonistic. With the sharp logic, the headlong consistency of extreme youth,

he hurls back a contemptuous "No" to the friend who bids him take life as he finds it, with its joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, insufficiencies and failures, and live it, a man among his fellow men, while all the time harbouring within him the consciousness of a high vocation.

Many causes combined at this time to make him speak this emphatic "No." For Paracelsus was one pre-eminently set on high. The burden of genius was laid upon him. He saw where other men were blind, or at best dimly discerned:—

> "I stood at first where all aspire at last
> To stand: the secret of the world was mine.
> I knew, I felt (perception unexpressed,
> Uncomprehended by our narrow thought,
> But somehow felt and known in every shift
> And change in the spirit,—nay, in every pore
> Of the body, even,)—what God is, what we are,
> What life is."

Further, he believed that he was thus exceptionally dowered, because an exceptional task awaited him in the world; and that some power, not himself, called him out—out:

> "——I, singled out for this, the One!
> Think, think! the wide East, where all wisdom sprung;
> The bright South, where she dwelt; the hopeful North
> All are passed o'er—it lights on me!"

And he was only nineteen years old. To him no compromise seemed possible; to the call he must either make the ready answer or else "the great refusal." No such thing as the adjusting of his ideals to the requirements of circumstances occurred to him. To him the lowering of an ideal once conceived was the betrayal of a trust. Neither did any small prize by the way allure him; there was to be no patient heaping up of gain upon gain; he desired rather

> "——to gain one prize
> In place of many—the secret of the world,
> Of man, and man's true purpose, path, and fate."

With this aim, vast and shadowy in the distance, he turned his eyes persistently away from all that lay in his path. He looked for no help from the work of other men; for had not all hitherto failed? The past was barren, the present dull, easily satisfied with small successes, which in the light of the absolute were unsuccess. The joys of every-day flesh and blood existence were hindrances. Men, with their petty knowledge, their still more petty loves and hates, he despised. It is true that he loved his friends; Festus, the elder-brother friend, loyal and devoted; Michal,

with the heart of a child, she, who would "sing alone, birdlike," her face ever wearing

> "———that quiet and peculiar light
> Like the dim circlet floating round a pearl."

But their love, though sweet, was rather the tender accompaniment to his real life outside of them than any essential part of it. For love, and all the emotional side of life, was what he judged he must turn his back upon; and although all that he sought was for the benefit of mankind at large, yet he despised his fellow men:

> "———I seemed to long
> At once to trample on, yet save mankind,
> To make some unexampled sacrifice
> On their behalf, to wring some wondrous good
> From heaven or earth for them, to perish, winning
> Eternal weal in the act: as who should dare
> Pluck out the angry thunder from its cloud,
> That, all its gathered flame discharged on him,
> No storm might threaten summer's azure sleep:
> Yet never to be mixed with men so much
> As to have part even in my own work, share
> In my own largess. Once the feat achieved,
> I would withdraw from their officious praise,
> Would gently put aside their profuse thanks.
> Like some knight traversing a wilderness,
> Who, on his way, may chance to free a tribe
> Of desert-people from their dragon-foe;
> When all the swarthy race press round to kiss

His feet, and choose him for their king, and yield
Their poor tents, pitched among the sand-hills, for
His realm: and he points, smiling, to his scarf
Heavy with riveled gold, his burgonet
Gay set with twinkling stones—and to the East,
Where these must be displayed!"

This, which he characterised to Festus as his "first mad impulse," when, after the calm and seclusion of his childhood's home, he "first viewed the thronged, the everlasting concourse of mankind," was the attitude towards his fellow men to which he constantly returned at this time.

It had not always been so with him. In his early boyhood, the love of his friends, Einsiedeln and its green hills, had been all the world to him. It is true that, in the light of after-years, looking back, he knew that from a child he had been "possessed by a true fire;" but he did not at first understand it, or think of giving it vent:

"I was not born
Informed and fearless from the first, but shrank
From all that marked me out apart from men:
I would have lived their life, and died their death,
Lost in their ranks, eluding destiny."

But destiny chose for its instrument Festus,—patient, plodding Festus. He it was who, first

noting some unusual power in the dreamy boy, urged him to know mankind, and to know himself, to discover man's end and God's will, and to endeavour to realise them in his life. But Festus, limited and practical, little guessed what the end would be when, hoping only for Paracelsus a high place among his fellows, nothing more, he induced him to enter the school of the then famous Trithemius at Würzburg. Here Paracelsus began his studies,

> " In that dim chamber where the noonstreaks peer
> Half frightened by the awful tomes around."

At first, Festus reminds him,

> "———not one youth
> Of those so favoured, whom you now despise,
> Came earnest as you came, resolved, like you,
> To grasp all and retain all, and deserve
> By patient toil a wide renown like his."

But Festus soon found that the spirit to which he had thus helped to reveal its own powers, took a flight far beyond anything that he had calculated upon. He had been ambitious for Paracelsus, but it was with a reasoned and temperate ambition. The well-worn highway in the broad light of the sun had seemed to him to be the fitting scene of his successes.

He shrank from the unknown, the unprecedented, and had never dreamed of his entering upon a course that would shut him out from the common life of men. But who can set to the spirit of man a bound that it may not pass; or what man can rule the spirit of his brother? The struggle of Festus to stay the flight of Paracelsus was vain

> "as though a mother hoped
> To stay the lusty manhood of the child
> Once weak upon her knees;"

and soon we find him gazing with wide-open eyes of astonishment at that which his modest efforts have called forth. So must Aladdin have gazed at the bright spirit which appeared when first he rubbed his lamp. But Paracelsus decries this amazement as an inconsistency, for his present attitude is, he urges, but the logical outcome of the beginning to which Festus pointed him. Festus has been with him up to a certain point, the point of action, and here he holds back. They have agreed as to their "best scheme of life;" agreed further, that "faith should be acted upon." Finally, Paracelsus goes on to pro-

pose a definite plan of action, but here Festus stops short—

> "————so that at last
> It all amounts to this—the sovereign proof
> That we devote ourselves to God, is seen
> In living just as though no God there were;
> A life which, prompted by the sad and blind
> Folly of man, Festus abhors the most;
> But which these tenets sanctify at once,
> Though to less subtle wits it seems the same,
> Consider it how they may."

Thus does the cruel, uncompromising logic of youth confront the shrinking back of a man who was quite willing to rest happily upon the reflection—

> "What hand and brain went ever paired?
> What heart alike conceived and dared?
> What act proved all its thought had been?
> What will but felt the fleshly screen?"

With Paracelsus to conceive was to dare, to think was to act; the fleshly screen was a hindrance, but one that he was determined to overcome.

And he had tried the beaten track at first. He had begun by plunging into the pursuits of his fellows, in the school of Tritheim, not asking what the ultimate goal was; but amid a throng who struggled, he struggled too.

But soon he felt growing, and gradually taking shape within him, the conviction that the partial knowledge which was all that the best of his companions was aiming at, could never satisfy him. And then followed a time that he would willingly "slur over," during which the iron hand of "a slow and strangling failure" was upon him :—

> "We aspired alike,
> Yet not the meanest plodder Tritheim counts
> A marvel, but was all-sufficient, strong,
> Or staggered only at his own vast wits ;
> While I was restless, nothing satisfied,
> Distrustful, most perplexed."

He did so much less than the others ; he loathed himself as weak compared with them ; "yet somehow felt a mighty power was brooding, taking shape within him." At last there was "a sudden pause, a total change ;" and now all the vague, dimly understood promptings of his boyhood gathered force, until at last, one night ; —for Paracelsus, like many another could lay his hand upon one day in his life, which changed for him the whole face of the world,— "what was a speck expands into a star," and the blind saw. It was no new knowledge forced in upon an alien soul ; it was rather that

a veil which had obscured the light was all at once drawn aside, and he saw that which had always been close to him, the life of his life. And the hand which drew aside the veil was from without:

> "One night
> When, as I sat revolving it and more,
> A still voice from without said—'Seest thou not,
> 'Desponding child, whence spring defeat and loss?
> 'Even from thy strength. Consider: hast thou gazed
> 'Presumptuously on wisdom's countenance,
> 'No veil between; and can thy faltering hands,
> 'Unguided by the brain the sight absorbs,
> 'Pursue their task as earnest blinkers do
> 'Whom radiance ne'er distracted? Live their life
> 'If thou wouldst share their fortune, choose their eyes
> 'Unfed by splendour. *Let each task present*
> '*Its petty good to thee.* Waste not thy gifts
> 'In profitless waiting for the gods' descent,
> 'But have some idol of thine own to dress
> 'With their array. Know, not for knowing's sake,
> 'But to become a star to men for ever;
> 'Know, for the gain it gets, the praise it brings,
> 'The wonder it inspires, the love it breeds:
> '*Look one step onward, and secure that step!*'"

And he smiled as one never smiles but once.

This is the true Browning theme, familiar to all readers of Browning, even the most casual;—the burden of the message which, in season and out of season, in its manifold aspects, he constantly repeats; the significance of apparent

failure; the old contrast between the "high man" and the "low man" of *The Grammarian's Funeral;* the meaning of the "broken arcs" to those to whom the vision of the "perfect round" somewhere, afar, has been vouchsafed. Paracelsus has seemed to fail; but —"what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence for the fulness of the days?" If he would be what men call successful, let him choose a task well within his grasp; let him "draw a circle premature, heedless of far gain." But if he proudly refuse thus to "discount life," then he must throw himself on God,—"He loves the burthen;" he must disregard immediate results, and see in his apparent failure only a proof and a natural consequence of the extent of his aim.

It is now that he first discovers what that aim is, and knows with a sudden lightning-flash that it is nothing less than

> "——*to comprehend the works of God,*
> *And God himself, and all God's intercourse*
> *With the human mind.*"

He looks the task full in the face, and knows that the path is "hard for flesh to tread therein, imbued with frailty;" that it must be undertaken for God's sake and for man's,

apart from all reward, that "in itself alone shall its reward be;" but he is all at once "endued with comprehension and a steadfast will;" and his brow is sealed to the work.

And now thenceforward "all things wore a different hue, pregnant with vast consequence, teeming with grand result, loaded with fate." That he does not see the goal distinctly is to him only the seal to his mission, the proof that this is no "arrogantly self-inflicted task," but rather his ready answer to the will of God who calls him. He is not going out in the pursuit of a goal arbitrarily chosen by himself, but in the effort to be true to the inner life of him which urges him on:—

> "——What fairer seal
> Shall I require to my authentic mission
> Than this fierce energy?—this instinct striving
> Because its nature is to strive?—enticed
> By the security of no broad course,
> Without success forever in its eyes!
> . . . . . Be sure that God
> Ne'er dooms to waste the strength he deigns impart!
> Ask the geier-eagle why she stoops at once
> Into the vast and unexplored abyss,
> What full-grown power informs her from the first,
> Why she not marvels, strenuously beating
> The silent, boundless regions of the sky!"

And further this vital energy within him

moves in answer to a power, which is, he repeatedly insists, without him. To the question of Festus as to whether he discerns the path as clearly as the purpose, or again the purpose as clearly as his own yearning to go out, he answers fearlessly,—not without a pause, but advisedly and fearlessly,—"What if it be so?" For he has not chosen the task. He goes out because he is called. Hence that the goal is shadowy, matters little; that the path is untrodden, matters not at all; that he should rise to the call is for him the one matter of paramount importance:

"————I profess no other share
In the selection of my lot, than this
My ready answer to the will of God
Who summons me to be his organ. All
Whose innate strength supports them shall succeed
No better than the sages." . .
. . . . . .
. . . . . .

"————I go to prove my soul!
I see my way as birds their trackless way.
I shall arrive! what time, what circuit first,
I ask not: but unless God send his hail
Or blinding fireballs, sleet or stifling snow,
In some time, his good time, I shall arrive:
He guides me and the bird. In his good time!"

One loves to dwell on this picture of Paracelsus in his youth,—the luminous insight, the indomitable faith, the teeming, tumultuous life. Festus is silent before it; the commonplace finds and recognises its own level in the presence of that higher thing, which, uncomprehended, is yet felt to be greater than itself. Michal, too, is silent; but Michal, the pure in heart, believing where she cannot see or understand, and thus seeing that which is hidden from the wise, recognises truth on the instant, never mistakes the signs; as the deep calls to the deep, and fire answers fire. To the question of Paracelsus,—"Do you believe I shall accomplish this?" her answer falls prompt and clear,—"I ever did believe!" The same magnetic fire seems to touch even the dullest reader who takes up this first book of *Paracelsus*. The very atmosphere is impregnated with life; while the spirit involuntarily goes out into those trackless regions where live all unnamed and unnamable aspirations.

Upon all this the word "failure" falls like something altogether incongruous, unexpected,

impossible. And yet, when we next see Paracelsus, nine years later, this is the word which comes uppermost. When we stand before the picture of Paracelsus in the house of the Greek astrologer in Constantinople we can only ask ourselves,—has he indeed failed? why to so fair a morning should succeed so dark a noontide? was it all a mistake? has he been wrong from the first? The answer to all this is emphatically,—he was right and not wrong; wholly right in the main, not wholly wrong even in his mistakes. The whole understanding of at least the Paracelsus of Browning depends on duly recognising just this,—the vision of his boyhood was true. To look upon him as one who throughout a confused and storm-tossed youth followed wandering fires, but who on his deathbed saw light at last, involves an entire failure to grasp at least Browning's conception of the man. It is true that when he brought down his vast, stupendous aim of devoting himself to the glory of God and the good of his fellow-men into the region of practical human activities, he mistook the means to the end,

true also that he failed to see what human nature really meant, and that from the actual fight he did not come out unspotted, that from time to time lower ambitions and passions made a slave of him; but never does he deny the heavenly vision. A true fire from God possessed him, a fire which he did not always understand himself; for what man can sound the hidden depths of his own spirit? but none the less a true fire:—

> "I knew not then
> What whispered in the evening, and spoke out
> At midnight. If some mortal, born too soon,
> Were laid away in some great trance—the ages
> Coming and going all the while—till dawned
> His true time's advent; and could then record
> The words they spoke who kept watch by his bed,—
> Then I might tell more of the breath so light
> Upon my eyelids, and the fingers light
> Among my hair. Youth is confused; yet never
> So dull was I but, when that spirit passed,
> I turned to him, scarce consciously, as turns
> A water-snake when fairies cross his sleep."

It is true that, for one horrible moment in the house of the astrologer the despairing cry is wrung from him,—"Ha, have I, after all, mistaken the wild nurseling of my breast?"—the saddest words in the whole poem; but

it is only for the moment; and it is significant that the doubt is immediately followed by a dread that he is going mad, and a prayer that God will spare his mind. The true Paracelsus, in his right mind, could never doubt just this; and it is a fact that at this and at no other point does this especial dread come to him. For, in truth, the last agony of despair is reserved not for those who fail themselves, but for those whose ideals fail. If, outside human blindness, weakness, or sin, still "heaven's blue above us," all is not lost; but "when God fails —despair!" And Paracelsus failing because he could not always see the light is a totally different thing from Paracelsus failing because his light was no light.

Why then did he not accomplish that which he set out to do, that which he was so confident of being able to do? Before seeing this it is necessary to have a clear idea of what his aim exactly was, not alone in its general tendency, but in its particular bent; translating it from the language of poetry into the ordinary language of every-day effort and attainment; for, if we would see how Paracelsus failed, we must first see the practical working

means which he adopted to reach a definite end.

A distinct theory of the universe underlay all his speculations and researches. The divine spirit, of whom are all things, was everywhere in the world. It manifested itself in many ways, but in itself was one. Throughout all nature, inanimate as well as animate, the same spirit was at work, the same spirit was the life of all things that live: God is he

> "From whom all being emanates, all power
> Proceeds; in whom is life for evermore,
> Yet whom existence in its lowest form
> Includes."

Thus all things are one. This is not the crude pantheism of the time of the historical Paracelsus, but a genuine nineteenth-century pantheism, subtle and metaphysical; and it culminates in a scheme of evolution distinctly modern. For Browning, like Paracelsus, preceded his age; and writing in 1835, at the age of twenty-three, many years before Darwin and Wallace gave to the world the theory of evolution which we associate with their names, he certainly foreshadows, if he does not anticipate some of their main ideas. In thus

ascribing to him an anachronism, there is no intention of ignoring that the idea of the inherent unity of all things belongs to philosophies which date back many centuries before the time of Paracelsus; and this inexhaustible thought contains in it the germ of so many things that the idea of evolution as we understand it to-day may well be included therein; nor must it be forgotten that the theosophy which Paracelsus professed had its own theory of evolution; but granting all this, these passages in "Paracelsus" have nineteenth century writ large all over them; and the handwriting is the handwriting of Robert Browning:

> "Thus he dwells in all,
> From life's minute beginnings, up at last
> To man—the consummation of this scheme
> Of being, the completion of this sphere
> Of life: whose attributes had here and there
> Been scattered o'er the visible world before,
> Asking to be combined, dim fragments meant
> To be united in some wondrous whole,
> Imperfect qualities throughout creation,
> Suggesting some one creature yet to make,
> Some point where all those scattered rays should meet
> Convergent in the faculties of man.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Hints and previsions of which faculties
> Are strewn confusedly everywhere about

> The inferior natures, and all lead up higher,
> All shape out dimly the superior race,
> The heir of hopes too fair to turn out false,
> And man appears at last. So far the seal
> Is put on life ; one stage of being complete,
> One scheme wound up."

But this is not all ; for since all things tend upward, man must tend upward too ; "progress is the law of life, man is not man as yet." Browning now boldly carries out the theory of evolution to its logical conclusion :—

> " But in completed man begins anew
> A tendency to God. Prognostics told
> Man's near approach ; so in man's self arise
> August anticipations, symbols, types
> Of a dim splendour ever on before
> In that eternal circle life pursues."

A belief in this high destiny of man was the starting-point of Paracelsus, coupled with a belief that, even now, "here and there a star dispels the darkness," and isolated men arise endowed with power to raise the race :

> " Such men are even now upon the earth,
> Serene amid the half-formed creatures round
> Who should be saved by them and joined with them ;"

and he adds,—"Such was my task, and I was born to it."

It is possible that all this was not so clear to him in his youth as it was on his deathbed, looking back; and it is certain that there were many faculties of man the value of which he fully recognised in the end, which he understood not at all at first; but the central idea was the same.

He further believed that the divine spirit in man was hampered and clogged by the flesh; and that many of the conditions of ordinary every-day life were incompatible with the development of man's higher, that is, his true nature. Truth, he conceived, was within man, but cloyed by these outward things; and knowledge meant a removing of all that hid and confined truth:

> "Truth is within ourselves; it takes no rise
> From outward things, whate'er you may believe.
> There is an inmost centre in us all,
> Where truth abides in fulness; and around,
> Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,
> This perfect, clear perception—which is truth.
> A baffling and perverting carnal mesh
> Binds it, and makes all error: and to KNOW
> Rather consists in opening out a way
> Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,
> Than in effecting entry for a light
> Supposed to be without."

Thus the problem for him who would raise

mankind was the problem of the flesh. "What is this flesh we have to penetrate?" See this soul of man, how from the cradle to the grave it is hemmed in, now more, now less, only set free at last by death. How often is the true soul of a man hidden in this way from his fellow men:

> "———One man shall crawl
> Through life surrounded with all stirring things,
> Unmoved; and he goes mad: and from the wreck
> Of what he was, by his wild talk alone,
> You first collect how great a spirit he hid.
> Therefore, set free the soul alike in all,
> Discovering the true laws by which the flesh
> Accloys the spirit!"

This, put shortly, was the task of Paracelsus,—*to discover the laws by which the flesh accloys the spirit;* and, this discovery once made, to set free the soul of all men alike, and thus to enable mankind to rise at one bound to its true height:—

> "Such is my task. I go to gather this
> The sacred knowledge, here and there dispersed
> About the world, long lost or never found."

What this "sacred knowledge" was Browning is not careful to indicate, true to the principle which he has laid down at the start of display-

ing rather the inner workings of the soul than the agencies by which such are influenced and determined. We know, however, that the historical Paracelsus did believe in some mystical natural force, some primal essence, the secret of which was to solve the mystery of life; for, much as he despised the learning of his age, he shared the vague belief current at this time in some occult affinity between the forces of nature and the being of man,—a principle which lay at the root of the sciences of the astrologer and the alchemist; and just as the agnostic to-day breathes in at every pore the Christian spirit, his standards and ideals wholly Christian, so Paracelsus must, of necessity, have breathed the atmosphere that surrounded him. He did, in fact, study astrology and alchemy; he was initiated into the mysteries of oriental adepts; he inspected and shared the labours of Tyrolese miners; sought out wandering physicians, wise women, conjurers and empiricists of all kinds; for who could tell that the sacred knowledge might not have fallen by chance into the hands of some one—some charlatan, it might be—who, all unconscious of his priceless possession,

gave to the world wisdom's baubles, while all the time, lying concealed in his bosom, uncared-for and unguarded, was the pure jewel of wisdom itself? It was however from the direct interrogation of nature herself that Paracelsus hoped most; and from her he sought to wring the secret of that mystic solvent which was, he believed, the key to the enigma of life. But the stereotyped dogmas of the school he despised, and the dry learning of all those whom the age considered sages; for was not all their learning hitherto practically naught, since inadequate, since all fell short of *the* knowledge which alone could serve mankind? Therefore he must not seek the true knowledge in "one of learning's safe retreats;" but he must go out alone, unaided by the past, upon untrodden paths.

In all this it was the good of mankind at large that he sought, not his own, and in man's glory God was glorified:—

> "I never fashioned out a fancied good
> Distinct from man's; a service to be done,
> A glory to be ministered unto
> With powers put forth at man's expense, withdrawn
> From labouring on his behalf; a strength

Denied that might avail him. I cared not
Lest his success ran counter to success
Elsewhere: for God is glorified in man,
And to man's glory vowed I soul and limb."

The weak points in the scheme of Paracelsus were briefly these. Like the "Grammarian," he aimed high; but, unlike the "Grammarian," he knew nothing of that view of human life which alone could reconcile him to the apparent failure which is the inevitable result of a high aim; in virtue of which the "Grammarian," in the teeth of what men called failure, could say, —"Man has forever!" knowing well that "no work begun shall ever pause for death." "I calculated on no after-life," Paracelsus expressly states. For him there was no heaven which would complete all that was wanting here on earth; this view of life he emphatically repudiates:—

"Mine is no mad attempt to build a world
Apart from his (God's), like those who set themselves
To find the nature of the spirit they bore,
And, taught betimes that all their gorgeous dreams
Were only born to vanish in this life,
Refused to fit them to its narrow sphere,
But chose to figure forth another world
And other frames meet for their vast desires,—
And all a dream! Thus was life scorned; but life
Shall yet be crowned: twine amaranth! I am priest!"

Next, and consequent upon this, he mistook what is "the sign and note and character of man;" and thought that power—power through knowledge—was the one thing to be aimed at. He believed that if man could only know all, and thence have all power, he would then rise to the height of his true destiny:—

> "——I gazed at power till I grew blind—
> Power; I could not take my eyes from that:
> That only, I thought, should be preserved, increased
> At any risk, displayed, struck out at once—
> The sign and note and character of man."

All the sensuous and emotional side of life he despised and neglected. Because the flesh could hamper the spirit, he ignored the value of flesh; and in repudiating weakness and sensuality, he went on to repudiate much that goes to make up humanity. Because love, ill conceived and ill placed, could carry in its train much that had power to weigh the spirit down, he rejected love; faith, hope, and fear were mere human weaknesses, to be shunned as he shunned lust. He turned away from the whole world of sense and feeling that lay around him;—

> "—— life, death, light and shadow,
> The shows of the world, were bare receptacles

Or indices of truth to be wrung thence,
Not ministers of sorrow or delight;
A wondrous natural robe in which she went."

In spite of his pantheism, the physical world was to him only the battle-ground upon which he went forth to try his soul, the unsympathetic material from which the knowledge which he strove after was to be wrested. While he sought in the deep mines of the earth, in the mountain solitudes, for something material and tangible which would hold for him the secret of the universe, all the time the purple evenings and the dewy dawns, the shimmering summer air, were whispering the secret to him with sweet insistent voices, but in vain, for his ear was not attuned to catch the sound.

And this contempt for all those attributes of man incident to a state of imperfection carried with it a contempt for other men's work both in the past and in the present. He ignored the fact that humanity is one great whole, closely knit together, that one sows, another reaps; one labours, another enters into his labour; that the work of each individual is — must of necessity be — imperfect

in itself. This imperfection caused him to estimate unfairly other men's work; and calculating men's aims from what they had accomplished, he estimated unfairly their aims also. The noble words of Festus found no echo in the heart of Paracelsus:

> "———(Seek)
> Calm converse with the great dead, soul to soul,
> Who laid up treasure with the like intent
> —So lift yourself into their airy place,
> And fill out full their unfulfilled careers,
> Unravelling the knots their baffled skill
> Pronounced inextricable, true!—but left
> Far less confused. A fresh eye, a fresh hand,
> Might do much at their vigour's waning-point;
> Succeeding with new-breathed, new-hearted force,
> As at old games the runner snatched the torch
> From runner still."

Paracelsus had no sympathy with broken lights, with ineffectual strivings:—

> "Their light! The sum of all is briefly this:
> They laboured and grew famous, and the fruits
> Are best seen in a dark and groaning earth
> Given over to a blind and endless strife
> With evils, what of all their lore abates?
> No; I reject and spurn them utterly
> And all they teach. Shall I sit beside
> Their dry wells with a white and filmed eye,
> While in the distance heaven is blue above
> Mountains where sleep the unsunned tarns?"

Thus, rejecting the great past, despising his fellowmen, he isolated himself, cutting himself off from the springs of the common life of humanity.

All these mistakes sprang from a common source,—his view of the nature and purpose of this life from the cradle to the grave. This earth was to be the scene of his triumphs, as of his activities; here he was to find that which would "stay his longings vast." He sought to be satisfied here, little dreaming that satisfaction such as this would be the death of his soul. In thus making the earth his sphere, he made at the same time too great and too small demands upon this life; too great, for he sought in it that satisfaction which a season of growth and probation cannot and must not give; too small, for this life as it is, with all its hindrances and limitations, with all its evil, seemed to him wholly bad,—"a scene of degradation, ugliness, and tears, the record of disgraces best forgotten, a sullen page in human chronicles fit to erase." He required of earth that it should yield him all or nothing. He knew nothing of gain in and in virtue of opposition; did

not reflect that a tendency upward was in itself gain, apart from any actual advance. What earth could give him—chances of growth, the machinery that could give his soul its true bent; just that doubt, perplexity, longing, pain, which give scope to the highest faculties of man, which call for faith, courage, love, self-sacrifice,—all this he did not demand of her, for he did not know the value of these things. What he did demand of her, full satisfaction for the highest aspirations of his soul, she could not give. And further, if she had given it, it would have been a curse and not a blessing. For, to be satisfied here, this, as Browning puts it elsewhere, "this is death and the sole death;" the man who is sufficient to himself,

> "That man has turned round on himself and stands,
> Which in the course of nature is, to die."

This was the lesson which life was to teach Paracelsus. For he was out of harmony with the conditions under which he lived. The man who despises life here on earth, because he has seen the Beatific Vision, and, like Lazarus in "Karshish," cannot henceforward properly estimate the things of earth, has a consistent

philosophy of life; the man who says,—"Eat, drink, be merry; to-morrow we die!" has the same. Paracelsus combined the antagonistic elements in both views; for, while looking for no after-life, he despised this life. True, the secret once his, in perfected humanity here on earth he would have found the missing note; but until and unless this was found, all was discord and confusion.

Meantime, none the less brightly gleamed in the distance the golden pinnacles of the city of his dreams and his desires; and with burning faith and steadfast will he set out confident of reaching it one day.

II.

PARACELSUS AT BASIL.

"Love's undoing taught me the worth of love in man's estate."

PARACELSUS met Aprile at a turning-point in his life. He stood then where two ways met, and Aprile it was who determined his course. Nine years had passed since he set out with such indomitable confidence,—nine years, and the way had been long and stubborn. Now, though still young, he found himself with "grey hair, faded hands, and furrowed brow." He had gone on with his eyes so intent upon the distant goal that he had not noticed before how little progress he had made, and how time was passing. The accident of his going to the house of the Greek astrologer at Constantinople first awoke him to the consciousness of this. For this man required of Paracelsus, as of

all who came to him for help, that he should note down in a book especially kept for such records, all that he had attained to up to this, the plain hard facts, just the knowledge, practical, tangible, that he had acquired. There was to be no filling up of the blanks by

> "A brilliant future to supply and perfect
> All half-gains and conjectures and crude hopes;"

nothing was to be recorded except that actually gained. And what had he written? A few blurred characters sufficed to record—practically nothing. He had wandered through many lands, and had made a few isolated discoveries, valueless in themselves, mere fragments of truth; and there they lay, all in "a dim heap, fact and surmise together confusedly massed;"

> "And yet these blottings chronicle a life—
> A whole life, and my life!"

He now stood face to face with a fact that in his confident youth he must indeed have known, but that he had not taken into account, and yet the most obvious and universal of all facts;—life on earth is

limited, and man's physical powers are limited. There it was, facing him, standing and blocking the way. He had nothing to reproach himself with in his pursuit of the end which he had set before him. He had not "gone slightingly through his task;" he had subdued his life beyond the obligation of his strictest vow, given his nature up,

> "——Consenting fully
> All passionate impulses its soil was formed
> To rear, should wither;"

his renunciation of love and all the softer elements in life was now more complete than it had been nine years before; for his pursuit of knowledge had developed in him still further a "wolfish hunger after knowledge" much more absorbing than even the craving of his youth had been; and yet he had not reached the goal; he had made no appreciable advance towards it; and his physical powers were failing. And now a miserable doubt comes. Has he been wholly right in this fruitless renunication of all human joys? Thoughts of Festus, of Michal and the loves of his youth, crowd in upon him, caressingly, appealingly. Surely, if God's sun has shone

on his pursuit of knowledge, "o'er that happy strip a sun shone too;"

> "And fainter gleams it as the waves grow rough,
> And still more faint as the sea widens; last
> I sicken on a dead gulf streaked with light
> From its own putrefying depths alone.
> Then, God was pledged to take me by the hand;
> Now, any miserable juggle can bid
> My pride depart."

And there is a lower depth still which opens out under his feet, a deeper curse. Worse than failure, worse than the weariness of the baffled fighter, the loss of youth and his brave hopes, is the horrible suggestion,—have his aims remained pure as ever? has he kept his primal light from waning? why is it that he cannot wish that, though he sink, some other may succeed?

> "O God, the despicable heart of us!
> Shut out this hideous mockery from my heart!"

Thus, exhausted, perplexed, doubting, despairing, what can he do next? First the idea of rest holds him, and, once entertained, quickly gains ground. How good to dare let down the high-strung brain, to unnerve the harassed,

over-taxed frame. But soon he gathers strength, and casts the thought from him :—

"No, no, there needs not this; no, after all,
At worst I have performed my share of the task;
The rest is God's concern; mine, merely this,
To know that I have obstinately held
By my own work. The mortal, whose brave foot
Has trod, unscathed, the temple court so far
That he descries at length the shrine of shrines,
Must let no sneering of the demons' eyes,
Whom he could pass, unquailing, fasten now
Upon him, fairly past their power; no, no——
He must not stagger, faint, fall down at last,
Having a charm to baffle them; behold,
He bares his front: a mortal ventures thus
Serene amid the echoes, beams, and glooms!
If he be priest henceforth, if he wake up
The god of the place to ban and blast him there,
Both well! What's failure or success to me?
I have subdued my life to the one purpose
Whereto I ordained it; there alone I spy;
No doubt, that way I may be satisfied."

But how go on? He has fed "a fire meant to hold out till morn arrived with inexhaustible light," and "lo, I have heaped my last, and day dawns not."

It is at this point, when to stop and when to go on seem alike impossible, that he meets Aprile; and Aprile pours into his ears his gospel of love—love—love. Aprile too has missed the goal; but his aim was not that of

Paracelsus, nor were their weak points the same. "I would love infinitely, and be loved," is his own statement of his aim. He has in short seen only too well the exceeding value of all that Paracelsus has despised and neglected. He has bathed himself, lost himself, in "the loveliness of life." The beauty of the robe, that wondrous garment in which truth clothes herself so as to be visible to mortal eye, that robe which Paracelsus could not see for straining after the vision of the form which it clothed, was to Aprile all-sufficient. He had failed to learn that knowledge must go hand in hand with love; and that to realise in its fulness even the frailest joy, there must be earnest endeavour and patient toil. But unlike as he was to Paracelsus, and unlike as his aim had been, he nevertheless resembled Paracelsus in this, that he too failed to realise that he must work within life's limitations, never satisfied, but never despairing. He had gazed presumptuously on the face of beauty herself, and nothing less could satisfy him. He could not carry out the petty task of embodying imperfectly one small fraction of beauty, and giving it to the world, while all around him

shapes innumerable pressed, dazzling him, blinding him, visions of beauty which no means within his reach could adequately represent. And now, in spite of his rich endowments, gifts bestowed on him to be used in the service of his fellow men, he is dying, having accomplished nothing. But at the last the primal light waxes only the brighter. Failure has begotten in him no doubt as to the value of that which he has aimed at. Too much love was his undoing; and yet, with no uncertain voice, but unhesitatingly, emphatically, he asserts the end of life to be love.

And to Paracelsus love's undoing, in the case of Aprile, first teaches "the use of love in man's estate." Thus must the years have thrown much light for him on the significance of failure. Aprile dying because blinded by love and the loveliness of life, only serves to show to Paracelsus the exceeding value of all the sensuous side of life, of all that he has neglected. Not that it shakes his faith in his own aim; rather they are the two parts of a dissevered world,—parts which God has joined together here on earth, in indissoluble union, and which Paracelsus and Aprile had both tried to rend asunder.

The direct result of the influence of Aprile upon Paracelsus was that he now determined to work while he had the light, "for the night cometh;" and to give his gains, all meagre and imperfect as they were, to the world. Later he describes this passage in his life to Festus. Just at this time a passionate regret for youth and health and love so vainly lavished was foremost in his thoughts;

> "———and this strange fact
> Humbled me wondrously, and had due force
> In rendering me the less averse to follow
> A certain counsel, a mysterious warning—
> You will not understand—but 't was a man
> With aims not mine and yet pursued like mine,
> With the same fervour and no more success,
> Perishing in my sight; who summoned me
> As I would shun the ghastly fate I saw,
> To serve my race at once; to wait no longer
> That God should interfere on my behalf,
> But to distrust myself, put pride away,
> And give my gains, imperfect as they were,
> To men."

For this was the lesson that Aprile's own wasted life had taught him:—

> "———Nay, listen,
> Knowing ourselves, our world, our task so great,
> Our time so brief, 't is clear if we refuse
> The means so limited, the tools so rude

> To execute our purpose, life will fleet,
> And we shall fade, and leave our task undone.
> We will be wise in time:"

Paracelsus now determines to profit by this warning. Since he can never do all that he once hoped to do, he will at least do that which lies within his power. To this end he now accepts the chair of medicine at the University of Basil.

Here he enters upon a life entirely new, and one for which all that has gone before has in no wise fitted him. For his real knowledge is vast, shadowy, incommunicable; while the empirical knowledge, scraps, odds and ends, the few secrets that he has acquired by the way, form no consistent scheme, and yet they are all that he can give to the world. But just this knowledge was received with enthusiasm by his hearers. The age was not scientific; and certain real discoveries in chemistry, as well as certain real cures effected by him, soon won for him a reputation that made him feel strong enough to attack openly all the systems of medicine that had preceded him. For this he was applauded both by those to whom his cures seemed marvellous and also by those in

whom the spirit of revolt was strong; and soon we find the theatre at Basil thronged with eager students who press round the new master,—

> "The wondrous Paracelsus, life's dispenser,
> Fate's commissary, idol of the schools
> And courts."

With all this a new pitfall opened out under his feet, one least expected by him, and against which he was least on his guard. Who could have dreamed that he, who despised anything which fell short of the one true knowledge, absolute and complete, could be flattered by this homage paid to knowledge which he knew was in itself valueless? He, who had gazed at the true wisdom full in the face, how could he have foreseen that he could ever descend to posing as a wonder-worker, because he was in possession of a few chemical secrets which so far the rest of the world knew nothing of? It was a profound student of human nature who once said,—"Be on your guard against that fault which you think you are most free from." Paracelsus seems to have succumbed to the unexpectedness and the suddenness of the

onslaught. The transition from the weary, fruitless searching for the unattainable to rest —a resting upon that gained, however small, —from the constant, grinding sense of failure to the atmosphere of eager recognition, must have brought balm to the weary spirit; and the flowery path in the valley once entered upon, it was hard to return to the arid desert or the rugged mountain side. But the man who "pressed God's lamp close to his breast" could not rest upon this. He might sink, but he could not sink and be happy. The picture of Paracelsus at Basil presents a psychological study of the deepest interest, crowded with apparent inconsistencies, but for this reason all the more true to human nature, a study in which cross lights meet and seem to clash, while now this, now that side of a many-sided nature presents itself.

One prominent point to notice is that the influence of Aprile in urging upon him the part which love ought to play, and does in fact play, in human life, has acted only partially and ineffectively. He had seen with a sudden flash his own deep error in ignoring all this side of life, and had quickly deter-

mined to live differently. But to give one's life an entirely new bent is a thing easier to resolve upon than to carry through; nor is it always a safe or a wise thing to endeavour to *sortir de son génie.* Paracelsus and Aprile had each of them a distinct individuality, which neither could escape from. God speaks with many voices to many men. He had spoken to Aprile through the loveliness of life; he had spoken to Paracelsus in visions of the night. The voice was one, but the form in which each heard it bore the impress of the personality of each. There is an indescribable pathos in the words with which Paracelsus describes his efforts to give his life this new bent:—

> "God! how I essayed
> To live like that mad poet, for a while,
> To love alone; and how I felt too warped
> And twisted and deformed! . . .
> . . . . . .
> I cannot feed on beauty for the sake
> Of beauty only, nor can drink in balm
> From lovely objects for their loveliness;
> My nature cannot lose her first imprint;
> I must still hoard and heap and class all truths
> With one ulterior purpose: I must know!
> Would God translate me to his throne, believe
> That I should only listen to his word

> To further my own aim! For other men,
> Beauty is prodigally strewn around,
> And I were happy could I quench as they
> This mad and thriveless longing, and content me
> With beauty for itself alone: alas!
> I have addressed a frock of heavy mail,
> Yet may not join the troop of sacred knights;
> And now the forest creatures fly from me,
> The grass-banks cool, the sunbeams warm no more."

He feels that he has lived for knowledge and failed; that he has tried to live for love, and failed; thus he is betrayed by both. He is experiencing all the worse effects of following the advice of Aprile, and none of the better. He has curbed his spirit's flight, and consented to fill "the petty circle lotted out of infinite space," which is all that life here at Basil offers to him, and yet he cannot live the ordinary life of ordinary men and women—loving, fearing, hoping, trusting; and he cannot love these men whom he feels to be so far beneath him, and in whom love shows itself in a form so different from his conception of what it ought to be. For he has entered upon the thought of Aprile with the same headlong impetuosity which has always characterised him. He understands no compromise. If love is all, love must be pure and strong,

or it is worthless; and because he cannot see that it is this in any of his fellow-men, he rejects it utterly in them.

And now the lower consolations incident to such a life become clamorous, and he is not deaf to their voices. While despising the adulation which he received, he yet likes it and encourages it, having so far fallen away from his once proud attitude as to feel that, since he can no longer look for the true recompense, he may at least accept those crumbs by the way, due to him from a world that he has used himself up in serving. And there is a lower depth still; for the claims of the flesh which he seems to have crucified in vain, now become urgent. Now that he has found out that that for which he has foregone all youthful appetites is unattainable, the low thought suggests itself,—at least why not enjoy? If the highest satisfaction, if true happiness is impossible, pleasure, at least, is always within one's reach:

> "Yet, I deny not, there is made provision
> Of joys which tastes less jaded might affect;
> Nay, some which please me too, for all my pride—
> Pleasures that once were pains: the iron ring
> Festering about a slave's neck grows at length
> Into the flesh it eats. I no longer hate

> A host of petty vile delights, undreamed of
> Or spurned before; such now supply the place
> Of my dead aims: as in the autumn woods
> Where tall trees used to flourish, from their roots
> Springs up a fungus brood sickly and pale,
> Chill mushrooms coloured like a corpse's cheek."

Thus he is incapable of sharing in the higher joys of actual flesh and blood existence, while the lower hold him in thrall.

And through all this the light burns bright. He never deceives himself. He knows that all his outward success is degradation: "As though here did not signify defeat!" he retorts with impatience to Festus, good, simple Festus, who sees in the high position of Paracelsus at Basil just all that he has longed for and dreamed of for him; and who, when Paracelsus talks of defeat, urges—"Still I find you here!' as an incontrovertible proof of success. Paracelsus has no such illusions; no apparent success blinds him for a moment. It is not so much that these people praise him for powers that he does not really possess, it is that, even if he possessed them, there is still the break-down of his general aims, a failure in him to reach that for which God intended him. It is the ever-present sense of this, the

imperishable power of his boyhood's vision, that keeps him from the lowest depth of all :—

"After all, Festus, you say well : I am
A man yet : I need never humble me.
I would have been—something, I know not what ;
But though I cannot soar, I do not crawl.
There are worse portions than this one of mine.
You say well ! . . and deeper degradation !
If the mean stimulants of vulgar praise,
If vanity should become the chosen food
Of a sunk mind, should stifle even the wish
To find its early aspirations true,
Should teach it to breathe falsehood like life-breath—
An atmosphere of craft and trick and lies ;
Should make it proud to emulate, surpass
Base natures in the practices which woke
Its most indignant loathing once . . . No, no !
Utter damnation is reserved for hell !
I had immortal feelings ; such shall never
Be wholly quenched : no, no !"

Why then does he remain at Basil ? one asks with Festus. For many different, almost conflicting reasons. It is really a counsel of despair. His earliest aims are unattainable ; the new life for love has proved itself impossible ; here, at worst, he does "most good and least harm ;" and here he is not wholly cut off from his old dreams ; "their faint ghosts can sit and flatter him, and send him back content to his dull round." He cannot,

it is true, join the band of sacred knights; but still he may "follow, dreaming that ere night arrive he will o'ertake the company, and ride glittering as they." It is this hope, the hope that he may one day aspire again, may one day enter again upon the life he has left which alone sustains him now, alone saves him from sinking beyond recall. And here he is doing, if not all that he hoped when he first adopted Aprile's advice, at least something; he is teaching what he can, meagre as it is. He is not doing it well, because his life's training has not taught him how to impart knowledge; and his "uncouth habits," his "small skill to speak," his "impatient spirit" render him ill-fitted to be a teacher; but, well or ill, he is working for other men. Even this, however, affords him but little satisfaction, while it is a continual occasion of stumbling to him. For the only knowledge which he can impart is not his best:—

> "I possess
> Two kinds of knowledge;—one—vast, shadowy,
> Hints of the unbounded aim I once possessed;
> The other consists of many secrets, caught
> While bent on nobler prize, perhaps a few
> Prime principles which may conduct to much.
> These last I offer to my followers here."

But just these secrets are what the vulgar voice exaggerates into miraculous powers; hence the temptation to vanity, deceit, and all the degrading depths that follow.

Thus is the tortured soul torn asunder by conflicting forces;—his old aims ever beckoning to him in the distance; the flagging body ever present with its monotonous, iron-tongued rejoinder,—"Thus far shalt thou go, and no further;" the lower gratifications both of mind and body ever within his reach; and the lower impulses within him too strong to be continually repressed, since repression avails nothing towards his old ends; and through it all the consciousness that he has missed much in life that can never be regained for the sake of that which he will never attain to.

And yet what an incalculable advance in insight he has made since, a boy of nineteen, he first looked out upon the world. The pain and turmoil of the last few years have wrested some secrets from life which the boy's keen eyes, gazing far afield, had overlooked. He is slowly but inevitably learning this lesson, that no man lives to himself,—learning how a man may best live his life in a world where "we

see through a glass, darkly." His first proud impulse was to see all, to know all. Well, he has gone out, he has striven his bravest; and yet he does not see; and the power that is stronger than he is none the less strong for that. Further, he now realises that he will never know with that perfect knowledge which alone can be a sure guide, if knowledge is to be the guide at all; and with this conviction comes, as it must come, a realisation that not knowledge is the especial mark of man at his highest; that man, being imperfect, and living in a world where perfect knowledge is impossible, must seek his being's true harmony some other way:

> "Were man all mind, he gains
> A station little enviable. From God
> Down to the lowest spirit ministrant,
> Intelligence exists which casts our mind
> Into immeasurable shade."

It is true that "the imperious thinking power" still holds him in thrall, because he cannot free himself; but he knows that it is thraldom; and he knows that this way he can never be satisfied. He is realising in his own life the workings of a truth which he has always recognised. For he has always known that

if God, for his own good purpose, does separate "man's pin-point rock of love and power" from his own "boundless continent," yet that the rock and the continent are one; but, in spite of this, he has isolated himself, and lived self-centred and self-dependent; and instead of looking upon himself as one member of an innumerable company, all deriving a common life from the one eternal source of life, he has aspired to stand alone and in his own right to know. Such a man may indeed live in the world, but he has cut himself off from the springs of life. There is no truer truth than just this,—the meek shall inherit the earth. Those who have best realised their dependence, and who live their lives recognising their true relationship to God and to their fellow-men, to them does this life yield its best. For these two things go together. The higher a man rises towards the one eternal source of life, the more does he respect the weakest signs of life in his fellow-men, knowing well whence it springs. It is he who has separated his own light from the boundless sea of light around him who despises the half-lights of others. This Paracelsus now knows,

although he cannot act upon it; and since knowledge is dethroned from its high place, all the other essentially human attributes assert their claim,—love, by which the being of a man goes out, reaches beyond itself, giving itself to, and thus possessing all things—that which binds all the world in one, as the calm ether binds the stars together; hope, which makes the darkness bright; fear, which warns a man at noon-day that the night comes; faith, which gives sight to the blind,—

> "Love, hope, fear, faith,—these make humanity;
> These are its sign and note and character."

These, the essential conditions of a state of training and probation, are the faculties in the possession and exercise of which alone a man can place himself in harmony with the rest of the universe; and he who attempts to lift himself above them runs counter to all the forces which are at work around him.

And the recognition of this carries with it for Paracelsus a juster estimate of his own work and that of others. He still knows that he is one of those especially dowered for an especial task; but the conviction that he himself, in this short

life, will never complete that task, causes him to look with new eyes upon the imperfect work of other men, and enables him to assign to himself his true place and rank among them :

> " Come, I will show you where my merit lies.
> 'Tis in the advance of individual minds
> That the slow crowd should gain their expectation
> Eventually to follow ; as the sea
> Waits ages in its bed till some one wave
> Out of the multitudinous mass, extends
> The empire of the whole, some feet perhaps,
> Over the strip of sand which could confine
> Its fellows so long time : thenceforth the rest,
> Even to the meanest, hurry in at once,
> And so much is clear gained. I shall be glad
> If all my labours, failing of aught else,
> Suffice to make such inroad and procure
> A wider range for thought : nay, they do this ;
> For, whatsoe'er my notions of true knowledge
> And a legitimate success, may be,
> I am not blind to my undoubted rank
> When classed with others : I precede my age :
> And whose wills is very free to mount
> These labours as a platform whence his own
> May have a prosperous outset."

Thus far has he advanced since the time when he " rejected and spurned utterly " the work of other men ; and when later, in the astrologer's cell, he could not wish that, though he failed, some other might succeed. He does not deny his own rich endowments ; he knows that he

can go further than other men, but only as one wave of the sea can go some feet further than its fellows; and he knows that an age which shall succeed him will go further than he.

But all this knowledge gained by experience lies confusedly heaped together. It has not so far grouped itself into a consistent scheme of life that can be acted upon. To Paracelsus now one, now another aspect of the truth has presented itself, but the whole lacks cohesion and rounding off; and the lesson is not yet learned until all shall have been woven into a consistent whole, and applied to practical, every-day life. His state of mind when he was at last driven from Basil, exposed as a quack, followed by the scorn of those who a short time before had extolled him as a god, shows how little practical effect all this new light had upon him. The strongest and most absorbing feeling in his soul was hatred of those whose stupidity had failed to recognise all that was true in him. For it was when he tried to be true that they rejected him:

> "Just so long as I was pleased
> To play off the mere antics of my art,
> Fantastic gambols leading to no end,

I got huge praise: but one can ne'er keep down
Our foolish nature's weakness. There they flocked,
Poor devils, jostling, swearing, and perspiring,
Till the walls rang again; and all for me!
I had a kindness for them, which was right;
But then I stopped not till I tacked to that
A trust in them and a respect—a sort
Of sympathy for them; I must needs begin
To teach them, not amaze them, 'to impart
'The spirit which should instigate the search
'Of truth,' just what you bade me! I spoke out.
Forthwith a mighty squadron, in disgust,
Filed off."

There is little trace here of any respect for the half-lights of others; it is difficult to feel that he recognises these men as in any way his fellows. He himself shudders before the picture which his heart, filled with contempt and hatred, presents at this time:—

"Festus, were your nature fit
To be defiled, your eyes the eyes to ache
At gangrene-blotches, eating poison-blains,
The ulcerous barky scurf of leprosy
Which finds—a man, and leaves—a hideous thing
That cannot but be mended by hell-fire,
—I would lay bare to you the human heart
Which God cursed long ago, and devils make since
Their pet nest and their never-tiring home.
Oh, sages have discovered we are born
For various ends—to love, to know: has ever
One stumbled, in his search, on any signs
Of a nature in us formed to hate? To hate?

If that be our true object which evokes
Our powers in fullest strength, be sure 't is hate!
Yet men have doubted if the best and bravest
Of spirits can nourish him with hate alone.
I had not the monopoly of fools,
It seems, at Basil."

And now that he is setting out again in the pursuit of his old aims, though not by the old means, in seeming to retain all that was good in his earliest scheme while rejecting all that was mistaken, there is still no harmonious whole, but rather a confused mass of conflicting beliefs and impulses. The old fire is still there, but also the old despair that followed. Further, the casting aside of the narrowing asceticism of his youth has caused him to forget the fact that in all true effort asceticism plays its part; or, if he still recognises this, passions and lower impulse once set loose refuse now to return to bondage. He states his scheme thus:—

"This is my plan . . . . . .
I will accept all helps; all I despised
So rashly at the outset, equally
With early impulses, late years have quenched:
I have tried each way singly: now for both!
All helps! no one sort shall exclude the rest.
I seek to know and to enjoy at once,
Not one without the other as before.
Suppose my labour should seem God's own cause

Once more, as I first dreamed,—it shall not baulk me
Of the meanest, earthliest, sensualest delight
That may be snatched; for every joy is gain,
And gain is gain, however small. My soul
Can die then, nor be taunted—'what was gained?'
Nor, on the other hand, should pleasure follow
As though I had not spurned her hitherto,
Shall she o'ercloud my spirit's rapt communion
With the tumultuous past, the teeming future,
Glorious with visions of a full success."

But that this plan had not in it the elements of success is abundantly shown by its working while he was still at Basil. Nothing could better describe the many different elements which went to make up his life there than these following words to Festus; and the whole is one great discord:—

"And Festus quits me
To give place to some credulous disciple
Who holds that God is wise, but Paracelsus
Has his peculiar merits: I suck in
That homage, chuckle o'er that admiration,
And then dismiss the fool; for night is come,
And I betake myself to study again,
Till patient strivings after hidden lore
Half wring some bright truth from its prison; my frame
Trembles, my forehead's veins swell out, my hair
Tingles for triumph. Slow and sure the morn
Shall break on my pent room and dwindling lamp
And furnace dead, and scattered earths and ores;
When, with a failing heart and throbbing brow,

I must review my captured truth, sum up
Its value, trace what ends to what begins,
Its present power with its eventual bearings,
Latent affinities, the views it opens,
And its full length in perfecting my scheme.
I view it sternly circumscribed, cast down
From the high place my fond hopes yielded it,
Proved worthless—which, in getting, yet had cost
Another wrench to this fast-falling frame.
Then, quick, the cup to quaff, that chases sorrow,
I lapse back into youth, and take again
My fluttering pulse for evidence that God
Means good to me, will make my cause his own."

What is it that is still lacking? Why cannot he act upon the knowledge gained, and add his little gains to those of the past, hoping for the future? With so much light why is the whole so dark and discordant? Is there no reason deeper than the force of old training, old habits? There is one truth which he has not yet realised so far that it forms any vital part of his scheme of life, and yet it is that which gives a meaning, gives cohesion to the whole. For life, even when the true relationships of things are duly recognised, is still meaningless if the grave ends it. Paracelsus up to this had "calculated on no after-life;" and even now a wondering, hesitating sense of life beyond the

grave has only just begun to arise in his soul, unbidden. Hearing of Michal's death, he gives expression to this :

> "Now, do you know,
> I can reveal a secret which shall comfort
> Even you. I have no julep, as men think,
> To cheat the grave ; but a far better secret.
> Know, then, you did not ill to trust your love
> To the cold earth : I have thought much of it :
> For I believe we do not wholly die.
> . . . Nay, do not laugh ; there is a reason
> For what I say : I think the soul can never
> Taste death. I am, just now, as you may see,
> Very unfit to put so strange a thought
> In an intelligible dress of words ;
> But take it as my trust, she is not dead."

It is not the death of a beloved friend which forces this thought in upon his soul, as might have been the case with a weaker man ; it is the lesson of life's experience. All that he has learned up to this is incomplete and of little value without this. For, in truth it is in the light of this alone that many of the conditions of human life, as lived here on earth, gain a meaning, and show a purpose. It cannot be denied that in some a vivid realisation of a future life has bred a contempt for this ; but they are the truer and the deeper

thinkers who know that it is only in the light of a future that we can say of this life,—"it means intensely, and means good." When once Paracelsus recognised the value of those attributes of man which have no meaning or use unless life is a probation-time, the sense of a fuller life somewhere, at some time, must have been in the background. But his apologetic tone to Festus,—"nay, do not laugh,"—shows how new and strange the thought was put into words and assuming a definite form. One can picture the perplexity of Festus, the man of unshaken orthodoxy, on finding that this, one of the most elementary articles of his creed, has only just begun to dawn upon the "mighty, majestic spirit" of his friend. Festus, walking in the old, beaten track, accepting without understanding, stands in the end hand in hand with the storm-tossed soul which sees at last, the conviction driven in by hard fact upon a brain that thinks and questions and weighs.

III.

PARACELSUS ATTAINS.

"My foot is on the threshold of boundless life."

WHEN we next see Paracelsus, thirteen years have passed since he left Basil, and he is dying. His "varied life," with all its storms and struggles, its aspirations, vain triumphs and defeats, "drifts by him," and now that it is past he first understands it all. What he failed to learn by "the happy, prompt, instinctive way of youth," the years, "exacting their accompt of pain," have taught him, and taught him well. He who in his proud youth esteemed a place among the proudest of the earth not supportable; who felt, when human effort rose highest, that he must elevate himself "far, far above the gorgeous spectacle," is now content to take his place with the lowliest of mankind:—

> " . . . Lay me,
> When I shall die, within some narrow grave,
> Not by itself—for that would be too proud—

> But where such graves are thickest; let it look
> Nowise distinguished from the hillocks round,
> So that the peasant at his brother's bed
> May tread upon my own, and know it not;
> And we shall all be equal at the last."

The failure of his own efforts, his own weakness, his own sin, in spite of what he knows to have been his own true light, have taught him to estimate fairly the failures and imperfections of other men; have led him to the knowledge of the meaning and use of all human limitations, and to that further knowledge, the last link in the chain, the knowledge of the true significance of that portion of life which lasts from the cradle to the grave. Now dying, outcast and disgraced, in the eyes of all the world most miserable, forsaken by all except his one friend Festus, who watches in love and loyalty beside his bed, he triumphs as he never triumphed before. All the scattered shreds of knowledge which the years have brought him, all the broken lights which have shone upon him, now bright, now dim, as, now with flying feet, now weary and footsore, he trod the path of life, are gathered into one; and lo, in the dark cell in

the hospital of St. Sebastian, it is bright noonday!

> "Where'er I look is fire, where'er I listen
> Music, and where I tend bliss evermore."

"Tell me but this," Festus asks him, "You are not in despair?"

Paracelsus. I? For what?
Festus. Alas, alas! he knows not, as I feared!
Paracelsus. What is it that you ask me with that earnest,
Dear, searching face?
Festus. How feel you, Aureole?
Paracelsus. Well:
Well.

Yes, it is well with him. He is dying, and thinner and thinner has grown the veil which hides the great unseen from the eyes of sense:

> "And this is death: I understand it all.
> New being waits me; new perceptions must
> Be born in me before I plunge therein;
> Which last is Death's affair; and while I speak,
> Minute by minute he is filling me
> With power, and while my foot is on the threshold
> Of boundless life—the doors unopened yet,
> All preparations not complete within—
> I turn new knowledge upon old events."

He now looks upon a future life as something so inevitable, so self-evident, that he no longer

states his belief in it as a conclusion, nor comments upon it in any way, as a scientist never stops to prove the heat of the sun to those who live by its rays. And this full realisation of the wider sphere upon which he is entering, so far from making him underrate the importance of earthly life, has the opposite effect; for the same light which illumines for him life beyond the grave, illumines also each back step in the life that is behind him, and the whole meaning of all that has been dark before opens out before him. Now that he at last realises the meaning of life, he realises the meaning of imperfection.

A perfectly clear and logically consistent principle lay at the root of the belief of Paracelsus all through. He could not acquiesce in the idea of imperfection as the ultimate stage of the human race; his reason, as well as his moral instinct, refused to rest upon the thought. He rejected it as something lawless, irrational, impossible. So long as he hoped for a perfected humanity here on earth, he looked for no after-life, because this life gave him all that he demanded. So soon as he learned in the hard school of experience that this hope was vain, then the conviction was forced upon him that

this was not the end. And the belief in a future life once his, all his life behind him assumed a meaning that it never had before. For it is certain that one makes totally different demands upon life according as one looks upon it as the ultimate goal or as a training ground in which the soul is fitted for its "adventure brave and new" beyond the grave. Limitations which are intolerable looked at in the one light, become more than tolerable, they assume a use and a purpose, when looked at in the other. It was when he knew that earth was not the goal that the idea of earth as a place of probation gathered force; and a different light was cast upon hindrances of all kinds as soon as they were looked upon as "machinery just meant to give the soul its bent;" a different light was cast upon his own failures, as well as the failures of other men, when once he knew that "no work begun shall ever pause for death." It is true that he might have so looked upon human limitations, seen the same "gain by opposition" as leading up to perfection here on earth; but his idea had been that the race was to rise to its true height all at once; there was no room in his scheme for

a gradual progress. The liberation of man was to have been a work altogether outside the individual; each man took no part, so to speak, in his own salvation. It was only in the light of the after-life that he seems to have seen that "man shall painfully attain to joy;" and that as a man struggles so does he attain.

But all this new knowledge only makes the vision of his youth stand out the clearer. Looking back he knows now "that rage was right i' the main, that acquiescence vain." True the reflex light from his deathbed reveals to him now for the first time what was the full significance of that "fierce energy" of his early days, "striving because its nature was to strive;" what he had seen confusedly then he now sees clearly; many things that he had not seen at all then form a vital part of his philosophy of life now; but the first use he makes of this fuller knowledge is to ratify the vision of his youth, and to declare with no uncertain voice that it was a true light that shone upon him then. Throughout his proud youth, his humbled manhood, and now on his triumphant

deathbed, there is the same pathetic insistence upon this :—

> " ———Festus, from childhood I have been possessed
> By a fire, by a true fire, or faint or fierce,
> As from without some master, so it seemed,
> Repressed or urged its current."

This was the faith with which he started ; and now he recalls as his best, truest moment, "that happy time when he first vowed himself to man." He now knows that in youth he stood already at that point which many men spend a lifetime in reaching ; and that he was thus especially endowed because he was given an especial task to do :—

> " Yes, it was in me ; I was born for it,—
> I, Paracelsus ; it was mine by right.
> Doubtless a searching and impetuous soul
> Might learn from its own motions that some task
> Like this awaited it about the world ;
> Might seek somewhere in this blank life of ours
> For fit delights to stay its longings vast ;
> And, grappling nature, so prevail on her
> To fill the creature full she dared thus frame
> Hungry for joy ; and, bravely tyrannous,
> Grow in demand, still craving more and more,
> And make each joy conceded prove a pledge
> Of other joy to follow—bating nought
> Of its desires, still seizing fresh pretence
> To turn the knowledge and the rapture wrung
> As an extreme, last boon, from destiny,

Into occasion for new covetings,
New strifes, new triumphs; doubtless a strong soul,
Alone unaided might attain to this;
. . . . . .
But this was born in me; I was made so."

But if the light which blessed his youth now blends with the light which crowns his death-bed, so that the whole stands out in dazzling radiance; if he now sees as he never saw before how deep are the wells from which it springs, how high the heavens which cannot contain it, its brightness shows him all the more his own deep errors, shows him the clouds which from time to time had obscured the light and betrayed him into strange by-ways:—

"This is my case:
If I go joyous back to God, yet bring
No offering, if I render up my soul
Without the fruits it was ordained to bear,
If I appear the better to love God
For sin, as one who has no claim on him,—
Be not deceived! It may be surely thus
With me, while higher prizes still await
The mortal persevering to the end."

He now sees as he never saw before, not even when it was first revealed to him by Aprile's fate, his own mistake in trying to separate the eternal truth towards which his soul went out in yearning from the lowliest manifestation of

it here on earth; as in those days when he thought that power, and power alone, was to be aimed at; when he despised mankind and despised the past, all because of imperfections and weakness:—

"I saw no use in the past, only a scene
Of degradation, ugliness and tears,
The record of disgraces best forgotten,
A sullen page in human chronicles
Fit to erase. I saw no cause why man
Should not stand all-sufficient even now,
Or why his annals should be forced to tell
That once the tide of light, about to break
Upon the world, was sealed within its spring;
I would have had one day, one moment's space,
Change man's condition, push each slumbering claim
Of mastery o'er the elemental world
At once to full maturity, then roll
Oblivion o'er the work, and hide from man
What night had ushered morn."

But as the years passed and the morning did not dawn, life was teaching him her lessons:—

" . . . As one by one
My dreams grew dim, my wide aims circumscribed,
As actual good within my reach decreased,
While obstacles sprang up this way and that,
To keep me from effecting half the sum,
Small as it proved; as objects, mean within
The primal aggregate, seemed, even the least,
Itself a match for my concentred strength—
What wonder if I saw no way to shun
Despair?"

Then it was that the fate of Aprile spoke to him :—

> "——Love's undoing
> Taught me the worth of love in man's estate,
> And what proportion love should hold with power
> In his right constitution ; love preceding
> Power, and with much power, always much more love ;
> Love still too straitened in his present means,
> And earnest for new power to set love free."

But even then the whole was not learned. If he admitted the importance of other human attributes a swell as power, he looked for those attributes in a state of perfection. He had yet to learn that as power, though not put forth blindly, cannot yet be controlled by perfect knowledge, but must be "used at risk, inspired or checked by hope and fear;" as knowledge is not all intuition, as he once thought, but "the slow uncertain fruit of an enhancing toil, strengthened by love;" so even love itself is

> "——not serenely pure,
> But strong from weakness, like a chance-sown plant,
> Which, cast on stubborn soil, puts forth changed buds
> And softer stains, unknown in happier climes ;
> Love which endures and doubts and is oppressed
> And cherished, suffering much and much sustained,
> And blind, oft-failing, yet believing love,
> A half-enlightened, often chequered trust."

Paracelsus had no tolerance for this. If he

now knew the value of love, he demanded all the more from love, not realising that love itself is subject to the conditions of growth, that it still struggles—upwards, it is true—but struggles. And he could not practise it in his own life. Because the people at Basil worshipped him for that which was worthless, he despised them; because they cast contempt on his "real knowledge, the few truths gained at a life's cost," he hated them. He could see no good in, and no hope for, men who were so blind. And why?

> "In my own heart love had not been made wise
> To trace love's faint beginnings in mankind,
> To know even hate is but a mask of love's,
> To see a good in evil, and a hope
> In ill-success; to sympathise, be proud
> Of their half-reasons, faint aspirings, dim
> Struggles for truth, their poorest fallacies,
> Their prejudice and fears and cares and doubts;
> All with a touch of nobleness, despite
> Their error, upward tending all though weak,
> Like plants in mines which never saw the sun,
> But dream of him and guess where he may be,
> And do their best to climb and get to him."

But now, dying, he whom the sun's radiance had dazzled knew, that for those who have never seen the sun, yet the same sun shines;

it is to them and to him the same source of life, one and eternal. It all came back to the same thing;—life is one, and he who neglects the weakest manifestation of life in others neglects a gift of God to himself:—.

> "Not so, dear child
> Of after-days, wilt thou reject the past
> Big with deep warnings of *the proper tenure*
> *By which thou hast the earth*: for thee the present
> Shall have distinct and trembling beauty, seen
> Beside that past's own shade when, in relief,
> Its brightness shall stand out: nor yet on thee
> Shall burst the future, as successive zones
> Of several wonder open on some spirit
> Flying secure and glad from heaven to heaven:
> But thou shalt painfully attain to joy,
> While hope and fear and love shall keep thee man!"

It was just this, the secret of the proper tenure by which the earth is held, that he had spent a lifetime in learning. It was, after all, a comprehensive lesson, nothing less than the meaning of life, the meaning of death, the meaning of life's limitations, and of death's possibilities. Truly a lifetime were well spent in learning it. Happy he who, like Paracelsus, masters it before he dies, and can "go joyous back to God." For Paracelsus now knows that the unquenchable thirst which has urged

him on from youth up till now was given him to be satisfied. God was pledged to fill the creature full whom he had made thus hungry. It was in forsaking the "instincts of that happy time," when "God was pledged to take him by the hand," so long as the hand was held out, that he had lost courage and hope. Now in the pardon of Aprile he sees the earnest of his own pardon :—

> "——If they have filled him full
> With magical music, as they freight a star
> With light, and have remitted all his sin,
> They will forgive me too; I too shall know!"

This blessed pardon, carrying with it, as it does, the completion of the nature of each, leads up to a higher note still, the note of the old indomitable faith of his boyhood :—

> "And this is Death! . . .
> . . . . . If I stoop
> Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,
> It is but for a time; I press God's lamp
> Close to my breast; its splendour, soon or late,
> Will pierce the gloom: I shall emerge one day."

Thus "after last returns the first." The same note is struck here as when he went out once before into a region similarly trackless, only

seeing his way "as birds their trackless way," only confident of arriving because "He guides me and the bird." He is now confident of emerging one day, only because the unquenchable lamp of God must pierce any gloom, however dense. He

> "———throws himself on God, and unperplexed
> Seeking shall find him."

CAPONSACCHI.

"O soldier-saint!"

THE beginning of *The Ring and the Book* repels us. It is not so much that we endorse Carlyle's characteristic comment,—"What a fuss about an Old Bailey trial!" but that it is a miserable story. Not even the touching picture of Pompilia as she was before the supreme revelation came to her, her beauty and transcendent purity of soul, can counteract the shudder with which we read of Guido, "half wolf, half man;" of his mother, the "unmotherly mother, and unwomanly woman;" of his brothers, rapacious and pitiless; of the Comparini, the "ambiguous creatures," too weak to be distinctly good or bad, yet strong enough, the woman at least, to hoodwink and to plot, to lie and to deceive,—

> "Two poor ignoble hearts, who did their best,
> Part God's way, part the other way than God's,
> To somehow make a shift and scramble through
> The world's mud."

Everywhere we find the same struggling towards selfish ends; greed, lust, cruelty; every where the law of expediency reigning and devotion to "the shows of things."

In the midst of all this murk and gloom, this tangled web of low motives and ambitions, suddenly there is

> "The cleaving of a cloud, a cry, a crash,
> . . . cower'd i' the dust the crew,
> As, in a glory of armour like St. George,"

Caponsacchi appears in the arena, with

> "Great, undisguised leap over post and pale,
> Right into the mid-cirque, free fighting-place,"

Caponsacchi, the man with the upward glance and the heart of gold, with "the broad brow that reverberates the truth, and flashed the word God gave him back to man," with the "purity of soul that *will not* take pollution," which neither "the contagion of the world's slow stain," nor the fiery pang of a sudden, sharp temptation has any power to taint. He now takes up the task shirked by those whose special duty it was, and with a steadfast gaze upon the eternal truth of things, ignoring danger and almost certain misrepresentation, he leaves the straight and safe path, and succours the oppressed. From this time forward

we breathe a new atmosphere; a light not seen before shines upon the scene.

And yet the character of Caponsacchi, man and priest, is not a simple one. There are some souls that are pure as snow; some that are pure as fire. Caponsacchi's was the latter. Although, equally with Pompilia, he tends upward, his was not the purity that no taint can come near, but rather the purity that is kept intact in the heart of it, saved, yet "so as by fire," the fire which burns and agonizes, and out of the throes leaves the pure gold. He had lived in the world "a man of the age and priest beside," "young, bold, handsome,"

> "Popular in the city, far and wide
> Famed, since Arezzo's but a little place,
> As the best of good companions, grave and gay
> At the decent minute; settled in his stall,
> Or sidling, lute on lap, by lady's couch,
> Ever the courtly Canon,"

with "wit at will, tact at every pore." His innate honesty of soul had caused him to pause, awe-struck, before taking the final vow to renounce the world:—

> "How shall holiest flesh
> Engage to keep such vow inviolate?
> How much less mine? I know myself too weak,
> Unworthy! Choose a worthier, stronger man!"

Although surrounded by others whose lives were inconsistent with their vows, he shrank from the hollowness of it. But reassured by his superiors that, even if he should still play the "fribble and coxcomb," yet he should, as priest, "nowise break word," he finally became a priest, and entered upon a life in which

> "—— mingling each its multifarious wires,
> Now heaven, now earth, now heaven and earth at once,
> Had plucked at and perplexed their puppet here;"

a life in which the lust of the eye, "earthly praise, repute o' the world, the flourish of loud trump, the softer social fluting," enticed him on every side, while the ideals of his order pointed him to the rugged mountain path. Satisfied, however, that he could live thus and still hold his head erect, he conformed himself:—

> "I . . . . both read the breviary
> And wrote the rhymes, was punctual in my place
> I' the Pieve, and as diligent at my post
> Where beauty and fashion rule."

And all the time there was the entirely serious side of the man in the background, a great reserve of strength, passion and enthusiasm. His meeting with Pompilia did indeed supply

the spark which drew fire from him; but it could not have created the "whole store of strengths eating into his heart which craved employ," which he becomes so keenly conscious of at this point, although it supplied the vent for their activity. Frivolous as his life had seemed on the outside, he had thought deeply:—

> "I have thought sometimes, and thought long and hard,"

he tells his judges;

> "I have stood before, gone round a serious thing,
> Tasked my whole mind to touch and clasp it close,
> As I stretch forth my arm to touch this bar.
> God and man, and what duty I owe both,—
> I dare to say I have confronted these
> In thought."

To such a man as this, with a vast reserve of unexerted powers, clamorous to find vent, the first genuine call for help was as powerful as the cry of distressed maiden to the Red-Cross Knight. Caponsacchi, before and after his meeting with Pompilia, seems to have been two different men; and there was a very distinct difference so far that the "revelation of Pompilia," with which he tells us he was "blessed," was at once the lightning-flash which

revealed the man to himself and the power which brought into action all the latent forces of his nature. But the man who saved Pompilia must always have been true and pure, nor does any man acquire a great fund of strength and self-forgetfulness suddenly, under the influence of a strong emotion. During his fribble and coxcomb days these qualities of heart and mind must have existed, and have been developing in Caponsacchi, as

> "The strawberry grows underneath the nettle;
> And wholesome berries thrive and ripen best,
> Neighbour'd by fruit of baser quality."

Harry of England did not turn sage in a day, no matter what the history books say; Shakespeare knew best.

Nevertheless, the meeting with Pompilia was the great crisis in the life of Caponsacchi, the turning point. It began that day in the theatre when he

> "—— saw enter, stand, and seat herself
> A lady, young, tall, beautiful, strange and sad,"

And she chanced to look at him.

> "That night and next day did the gaze endure,
> Burnt to my brain, as sunbeam thro' shut eyes,
> And not once changed the beautiful sad strange smile."

Ere the week was out an unwonted discontent with the whole course of his life filled him. What was the use and the end of it all?

> "'Tis but poor work this—
> Counting one's fingers till the sonnet's crowned.
> . . . . . Luckily Lent is near;
> Who cares to look will find me in my stall
> At the Pieve, constant to this faith at least—
> Never to write a canzonet any more!"

The first action of his awakened powers shows itself in the effort to be more of the priest, less of the worldling. His first impulse is to continue in the wonted rut, only henceforth in earnest. His devotion to his stall in church attracts the notice of his patron. "Are you turning Molinist?" the latter asks. "Sir, what if I turned Christian?" is the answer. Thus does he try to mend his life in the way that lay nearest to him. But the truth was gradually borne in upon him that his life was shaken to its lowest depths,—

> "———broke short indeed,
> And showed the gap 'twixt what is, what should be."

He had arrived at the point which many people—not all—reach at least once in their lives, when they find themselves at a "crag's sheer edge." They have come to an abrupt

halt, when life seems cut in two; when there is no going back, and no going on without a descent into the abyss. Such at least did Caponsacchi's life seem to him on that night when Pompilia at last

> "——took to the open, stood and stared
> With her wan white face to see where God might wait—
> And found there—Caponsacchi."

Now, when the distinct cry for help comes, the spark is applied to all those blind struggling powers within him, only half understood by himself. Now for the first time the real man shows himself. The change is overwhelming. All that night he paces the city, impotent to stem the tide which sweeps over his soul:

> "In rushed new things, the old were rapt away;
> Alike abolished—the imprisonment
> Of the outside air, the inside weight o' the world
> That pulled me down. . . . .
> . . . . . .
> Into another state, under new rule
> I knew myself was passing swift and sure;
> Whereof the initiatory pang approached;
> I
> Lay and let come the proper throe would thrill
> Into the ecstasy and out-throb pain."

But the grey of the dawn finds him again before the Church; and this time again, only

more strongly than before, does his quickened insight, the extension of his horizon, incline him towards obedience to his order, in spite of the revolution which has shaken his soul, or rather in virtue of it; for he now sees in a new light his relationship to the Church, which has taken his plighted troth; and never again for him can there be any trifling with anything whatever. Now that he realises in himself for the first time that

> "——life and death
> Are means to an end, that passion uses both,
> Indisputably mistress of the man
> Whose form of worship is self-sacrifice,"

he now knows first the duty of obedience. For "the revelation of Pompilia" was not personal, partial. It led him into *all* truth, or it was not true at all. There could be no such thing as a conflict between his duty to God and his duty to her. Duty to God was duty to her. This explains why, at this meeting with her, he says to her, "I am yours;" and he goes home and decides to leave her. Strange, one may say. But it was natural, fitting. Hear his own interpretation of it:—

> "Sirs, I obeyed. Obedience was too strange,—
> This new thing that had been struck into me

By the look o' the lady,—to dare disobey
The first authoritative word. 'T was God's.
I had been lifted to the level of her,
Could take such sounds into my sense. I said
'We too are cognisant o' the master now;
'She it is bids me bow the head: how true,
'I am priest! I see the function here;
'I thought the other way self-sacrifice:
'This is the true, seals up the perfect sum.
'I pay it, sit down, silently obey.'"

Two days later he sees Pompilia again; and this time a lightning-flash reveals to him a higher law than that of his order. A resolve to save Pompilia at any price takes possession of him without a struggle. He neither hesitates nor questions. The suddenness of the light and the reality of the consequent conviction is such that Caponsacchi himself, in telling of this, never thinks of commenting upon it. She makes known to him once more the extremity of her need, and the answer comes prompt and decisive:—

"Lady, waste no thought, no word
Even to forgive me! Care for what I care—
Only! Now follow me as I were fate!
Leave this house in the dark to-morrow night,
Just before daybreak:—there's new moon this eve—
It sets, and then begins the solid black.
Descend, proceed to the Torrione, step
Over the low dilapidated wall,

> Take San Clemente, there's no other gate
> Unguarded at the hour ; some paces thence
> An inn stands ; cross to it ; I shall be there."

Thus is the die cast ; and we too who read, in spite of Caponsacchi's former resolution, accept his action as the expected, the inevitable. And yet, although this is that point in the life of Caponsacchi which calls forth all that is highest and best in him, it is at the same time the point of extreme danger. For here he enters upon the abnormal, the exceptional ; he ventures upon a trackless sea without a chartered pilot. True he carried within him the pilot of the true heart and pure ; but what man can always order his own going ? And who can tell us when the duty of choice is laid upon us ? For the question where the duty of obedience ends and the duty of resistance begins has ever been one of the hardest to decide. How far ought a man to submit himself to rule, how far to follow his own impulses ? Loyalty, *esprit de corps*, the spirit of unity, unselfishness, all proclaim with a loud voice that a man ought to abide by his order. We can conceive of no fixed basis of human action, no great sustained effort, if we

once admit the principle that the individual instinct is to be the guide of each. "True guidance," Carlyle has said, "in return for loving obedience, did he but know it, is man's prime need." Caponsacchi was guide to himself. That he, a priest, should carry off from her husband Pompilia, a wife, was a distinct casting off of authority; and in thus being a law to himself he did that which for the large majority of men would have been wrong. He had, it is true, arrived at a point where no true guidance other than his own conscience was to be had; and his conscience spoke with no wavering voice. And if it was a wholly exceptional crisis he brought a wholly exceptional nature to bear upon it. This unerring instinct, gift of the strong-souled and the pure in heart, to the awe and wonder of their weaker brethren, who cannot live without rules and precedents, was one of Caponsacchi's leading characteristics. But he was doing that which could not be justified in principle, even though the action was justified; he was making the individual instinct the guide. That it did not err in his case was owing to the nobility of the individual man. A less noble man might have had for the moment the same

generous impulse, and yet have been unable to guide his steps upon the path that Caponsacchi trod assured. No man that was not true, pure, strong, single-eyed, self-sacrificing, intrepid, could have gone on to the end without sin or failure of one kind or another. Again, an ignoble man might well have had an ignoble instinct; and so have erred in following it. As Innocent XII. puts it very trenchantly, if Caponsacchi was right in following his impulse to save Pompilia, then Guido was also right in following his impulse to murder her. True, one man's instinct may guide him aright, but,

> "Will he repeat the prodigy? Perhaps.
> Can he teach others how to quit themselves,
> Show why this step was right, while that were wrong?
> How should he? 'Ask your hearts as I asked mine.'"

And yet, our instinct is surely not playing us false when it tells us that Caponsacchi was right and not wrong at all. We know that the chivalry

> "That dares the right and disregards alike
> The yea and nay of the world"

is wholly good. The strong rock of safety in Caponsacchi's case was, the man was true and single-eyed, and he was pure. His was

the "symmetric soul" which made him look straight and go straight. In his whole action he had no double object. The light was upon his path; and he walked assured,

> "Learning anew the use of soldiership,
> Self-abnegation, freedom from all fear,
> Loyalty to the life's end."

After his first meeting with Pompilia, he tells his judges,

> "The spark of truth was struck from out our souls—
> . . . . the first glance told me
> There was no duty patent in the world
> Like daring to be good and true myself,
> Leaving the shows of things to the Lord of Show,
> And Prince o' the power of the Air."

And he was pure:

> "In thought, word, and deed,
> How throughout all thy warfare thou wast pure,
> I find it easy to believe,"

is the testimony of the Pope. This Pompilia felt instinctively without a question, when first brought face to face with him, in spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Her first words are,—

> "Friend, foolish words were borne from you to me;
> Your soul behind them is the pure strong wind."

She neither hesitates nor questions; she knows. "As I," he tells us,

> "Recognised her at potency of truth,
> So she, by the crystalline soul, knew me,
> Never mistook the signs."

It is the power of this invincible truth and purity of soul which places both not alone beyond the reach of evil, but even beyond the reach of danger. For

> "———See!
> Pompilia wife, and Caponsacchi priest,
> Are brought together as nor priest nor wife
> Should stand, and there is passion in the place,
> Power in the air for evil as for good,
> Promptings from heaven and hell, as if the stars
> Fought in their courses for a fate to be.
> Thus stand the wife and priest, a spectacle,
> I doubt not, to unseen assemblage there.
> No lamp will mark that window for a shrine,
> No tablet signalise the terrace, teach
> New generations which succeed the old
> The pavement of the street is holy ground;
> No bard describe in verse how Christ prevailed
> And Satan fell like lightning."

And, with Caponsacchi, it was the purity of strength, not of ignorance or weakness. If he disclaimed utterly the idea that either he or Pompilia could have written "the vulgar and impure banalities called letters about love," it

was because, as he tells his judges, he, "a priest and loveless both," could teach them what love really was. What Pompilia felt by instinct, when, in her shrinking from her husband, she cried, "His soul has never lain beside my soul," Caponsacchi's keen eyes penetrated within and without. As he was a complete human being, not a disembodied spirit, he knew only too well that, since he was condemned to live his life in the "old solitary nothingness," while he could dream of what life might be, "companioned by the woman there," the highest faculty in him was maimed, inarticulate, that he missed the very fulness of life here on earth, that sacramental mystery in which things unseen express themselves in things seen; but,—and this again because he was a complete man, not one in whom the human endowment of a God-allied spirit is left out or crushed out of life,—that the outward expression without the eternal reality behind was a false thing. What Pompilia was to him he did not ignore, nor was he careful to conceal:

"—— I apprise you—in contempt
For all misapprehending ignorance

O' the human heart, much more the mind of Christ,—
That I assuredly did bow, was blessed
By the revelation of Pompilia. There!
Such is the final fact I fling you, Sirs,"

he tells his judges; but whatever his feeling for her was, it could not exist, given the circumstances of both, with what went by the name of love in the trial, where the word was bandied about among things untrue and unworthy,—that false, unlovely thing which comes to us clothed as an angel of light, but inwardly "maketh a lie." No temptation even seems to have come to him in the presence of Pompilia; we cannot find a trace of any vulgar struggle with himself during all that long journey to Rome. How could there be such? He was stirred to his inmost depths, perplexed, over-awed; but he was uplifted to a region into which no unworthy thought can enter. The influence of Pompilia had ever been the same over him:

"You know this is not love, Sirs,—it is faith,
The feeling that there's God, He reigns and rules
Out of this low world."

Joined to all this was the reverence of the

strong for the weak of the essentially manly man. He possessed the sense

> "That reads, as only such can read, the mark
> God sets on woman, signifying so
> She should—shall peradventure—be divine;
> Yet 'ware, the while, how weakness mars the print
> And makes confusion, leaves the thing men see,
> —Not this man sees,—who from his soul re-writes
> The obliterated charter,—love and strength
> Mending what's marred."

This tender chivalry in himself is hidden from Caponsacchi, for what does he say?

> "——— For Pompilia be advised,
> Build churches, go pray! You will find me there."

Thus while to her he seems to stoop, to himself he ever seems to look up.

And the final catastrophe, the murder of Pompilia and his subsequent examination, call into action another side of the man, hitherto dormant. He whose tenderness aroused such wonder in Pompilia that she asked him what woman he had been used to serve so gently, is uncontrolled in his anger, scathing in his scorn, when he finds himself before the men through whose supineness the crime has been made possible.

" . . . . . There stands he,
. . . . . .
There, where you yesterday heard Guido speak,
Speaks Caponsacchi . . . . .
Here sit the old Judges then, but with no grace
Of reverend carriage, magisterial port:
For why? The accused of eight months since
. . . . . .
Now is grown judge himself, terrifies now
This, now the other culprit called a judge,
Whose turn it is to stammer and look strange,
As he speaks rapidly, angrily, speech that smites:
And they keep silence, bear blow after blow,
Because the seeming solitary man,
Speaking for God, may have an audience too,
Invincible, no discreet Judge provokes."

The words of Caponsacchi do in truth bear fire enough to burn away like chaff all vain defences, all false superstructures that can hide the truth from the light of day:—

"Answer you, Sirs? Do I understand aright?
Have patience! In this sudden smoke from hell,—
So things disguise themselves,—I cannot see
My own hand held thus broad before my face
And know it again." . . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . . "If any of you
Dares think that I, i' the face of death, her death
That's in my eyes and ears and brain and heart,
Lie,—if he does, let him! I mean to say,
So he stop there, stay thought from smirching her,
The snow-white soul that angels fear to take

Untenderly. But, all the same, I know
I, too, am taintless, and I bare my breast.
You can't think, men as you are, all of you,
But that, to hear thus suddenly such an end
Of such a wonderful white soul, that comes
Of a man and murderer calling the white black,
Must shake me, trouble and disadvantage. Sirs,
Only seventeen!" . . . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . . "Men,
You must know that a man gets drunk with truth
Stagnant inside him! Oh, they've killed her, Sirs!
Can I be calm?"

But it is in his last words that the whole man, living and breathing, in his strength and weakness, aspiring, struggling, attaining, loving, and lovable, shows himself more fully:—

"You see we are
So very pitiable, she and I,
Who had conceivably been otherwise.
Forget distemperature and idle heat!
Apart from truth's sake, what's to move so much?
Pompilia will be presently with God;
I am, on earth, as good as out of it,
A relegated priest; when exile ends
I mean to do my duty and live long.
She and I are mere strangers now; but priests
Should study passion; how else cure mankind,
Who come for help in passionate extremes?
I do but play with an imagined life
Of who, unfettered by a vow, unblessed
By the higher call,—since you will have it so,—

Leads it companioned by the woman there
To live, and see her learn, and learn by her,
Out of the low obscure and petty world—
Or only to see one purpose and one will
Evolve themselves i' the world, change wrong to right:
To have to do with nothing but the true,
The good, the eternal—and these, not alone
In the main current of the general life,
But small experiences of every day,
Concerns of the particular hearth and home:
To learn not only by a comet's rush
But a rose's birth,—not by the grandeur, God—
But the comfort, Christ. All this, how far away!"

Far away!—and yet through all the sadness there is the note of triumph. If the words are spoken from the standpoint of the exile at the gate, the woman whom he saved and crowned knew him best, and she it is who tells us,

"Through such souls alone
God stooping shows sufficient of His light
For us i' the dark to rise by."

TWO POEMS ON PAINTERS AND THEIR ART.

THE reader of Browning's poetry cannot fail to be struck by the large number of poems which are devoted to artists and their art, as well as by the countless allusions to art prodigally scattered throughout, all showing how strongly he was attracted to the subject. It has sometimes been said that he seems to cast discredit upon art, as in one well-known passage in *The Last Ride Together*:—

> "And you, great sculptor—so, you gave
> A score of years to art, her slave,
> And that's your Venus, whence we turn
> To yonder girl that fords the burn!
> You acquiesce————"

But this certainly does not reflect Browning's own attitude. In a dramatic monologue one may believe that, when he represents a lover consoling himself for a lost mistress by calling

up the failures of other men, artists included, he is not of necessity giving utterance to his own deliberate conclusions on art. It is not a very profound reflection at the best; for the comparison is between two things which do not compare,—the marble Venus and the little mountain maid having two very different parts to play in life, the worth of neither detracting from that of the other. An entirely opposite view, and one which we cannot but feel is more in accordance with Browning's own, is expressed in *Fra Lippo Lippi*:—

> "We're made so that we love
> First when we see them painted things we've passed
> Perhaps a hundred times, nor cared to see;
> And so they're better painted—better to us,
> Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;
> God uses us to help each other so,
> Lending our minds out."

It is true that Browning was always a man first, an artist next; and even in those poems in which the central figure is an artist, it will generally be found that the broadly human interest is paramount; as in *Andrea del Sarto*, for instance, where our main concern throughout is with the man as a man. Further we find that, even when he deals directly with

art itself, his views on the subject are largely bound up with his view of life as a whole; and with him art is always subordinated to life. This is brought out in a passage in *James Lee's Wife*, which, while seeming, read superficially, to depreciate art, only assigns to art what Browning conceives to be its proper place as the interpreter of life, of that which is greater than itself. Thus that "Art for Art's sake" never was, never could have been, an article of his creed, is abundantly evident; but this was due to the fact that his larger enthusiasm for human life as a whole towered so high above his interest in and feeling for any special side of human life; not that he was not fully alive to the value of art.

There is, however, a manifest crudity in the extension of any such distinction; since art, looked at in its length and breadth, may almost be said to be an essential condition of life—as essential as worship, and almost co-extensive with it, co-extensive certainly with any effort to bridge over the gulf between the seen and the unseen. Even the savage, when he approaches his god, seizes upon art as the only means of expressing him; and

the language of his every-day intercourse falls into a rude lilt. But there must be much confusion of thought, as well as much difficulty in expressing one's thought, so long as we are without a generally accepted definition of art. Tolstoi, in his *What is Art?* has given us fifty-seven definitions of art from the pens of artists, poets, philosophers, psychologists, scientists, novelists, statesmen, — French, German, Italian, Dutch, and English, a goodly company. And then he tells us that they are all wrong! He next goes on to give us another of his own. That makes fifty-eight. All this is very confusing; one feels that one may as well give up all hope of ever arriving at a definition that will satisfy every one. One broad distinction, however, in the views of those who write about art comes to the front at once;—some give to it a distinctly ethical function, some do not; and Browning belongs to the former class. According to his view, art does not indeed exist for utility; for art is

> "the love of loving, rage
> Of knowing, seeing, feeling the absolute truth of things
> For truth's sake, whole and sole, not any good truth brings
> The knower, seer, feeler, beside."

But, although truth may be sought quite apart from gain, the knowledge of truth must bring gain all the same; and art with Browning has just this function,—it shows "the absolute truth of things" to those who could not see it without its aid. For, as he tells us elsewhere, the artist is he who has—

> "Head—to look up not downward, hand—of power
> To make head's gain the portion of a world
> Where else the uninstructed ones too sure
> Would take all outward beauty—film that's furled
> About a star—for the star's self, endure
> No guidance to the central glory,—nay,
> (Sadder) might apprehend the film was fog,
> Or (worst) wish all but vapour well away,
> And sky's pure product thickened from earth's bog."

The whole story of Aprile illustrates this,—Aprile, who, because he has neglected to use his gift for the benefit of his fellow-men, is represented as a "recreant to his race,"—one who has betrayed a sacred trust, since he has "left the world, he was to loosen, bound." Art is to be to the artist a means of growth, to the world a means of enlightenment; thus it "blesses him that gives and him that takes."

Browning was strongly drawn to art in all

its forms, and to artists of all classes; but he seems to have found the most attractive personalities in the ranks of painters; and he has written more about them than about artists of any other kind. The poems in which he deals directly with painters and their art stand before us in goodly profusion; and although not written by Browning with any such design, they illustrate in a kind of sequence different phases in the history of art:—Greek art, early mediæval art (*Old Pictures in Florence*), later mediæval art, early Renaissance art (*Fra Lippo Lippi*), later Renaissance art (*The Bishop orders his Tomb at St. Praxed's*, *Andrea del Sarto*); while his own views on art bring us down to the Pre-Raphaelite movement of our own day.

Of these poems, two in particular illustrate admirably two tendencies against which art has always had to struggle,—against which it is inevitable that art must always have to struggle;—the tendency on the one hand to ignore things unseen, on the other to depreciate things seen. For art must have both sides,—the real (the concrete) and the mystical. The Pre-Raphaelites promul-

gated no new doctrine when they demanded of art "uncompromising truth to nature in the rendering of visible things" joined to "a vivid realisation of things unseen." The true artist in all ages combines these two. Art, which has for its object the interpretation of things seen so that the unseen is revealed by and *in* them, cannot depreciate the one or the other without loss. But, since art lies in two regions which, to a sense, not finely poised, of the true relationships of things, seem so wide apart, it is inevitable that, among the rank and file of those who follow art, there will often arise an undue emphasising of the one side to the neglect of the other; and this very often takes the form of a tendency to separate the simple, the homely, and the familiar from the mystical and the awe-inspiring. The true artist makes no such divorce. He who approaches all things in a "temper of wonder, reverence, and awe," to him all things are wonderful; but it has happened in the history of art that tendencies towards such a divorce have arisen—tendencies against which the greatest have always endeavoured to struggle.

The Italian painters of the thirteenth century aimed at representing the invisible through their

art. They themselves made no mistake about it; they knew that this was best accomplished by fidelity to nature; but later, their successors, in their striving after the invisible, arrived in time at a method by which they represented the visible in a manner in which all fidelity to nature was forgotten or despised as unnecessary. Thereupon arose the art of the Renaissance with its exuberant sensuousness, its insistence upon the value of mere physical life. And in any movement of reform on the one side or on the other, the swinging of the pendulum just a little too far has always to be calculated upon. All this, and much more, is strikingly brought out in two poems of Browning's, *Old Pictures in Florence* and *Fra Lippo Lippi;* the watch-word of the one being, "Bring the invisible full into play;" of the other, "The value and significance of flesh."

Old Pictures in Florence was written in 1845, at a time when ideas of a revolution in art must have been surging in the brain of Rossetti, and three years before the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. In this poem Browning, if he does not anticipate, at least shows himself in sympathy with one of the

leading tendencies of the movement, in recognising the great work which the early mediæval artists did; and protesting against the neglect into which their works have fallen. He goes back with tender regret to that "season of Art's spring-birth so dim and dewy," when Cimabue and Giotto endeavoured, by patient and faithful study of nature, to create a new art, which would take the place of the art which they saw all around them, and which had long since proved itself incapable of answering to the needs of men,—a veritable renaissance in itself.

The poet, by a gift which, he tells us, God grants him now and then, looking upon Florence, sees, not alone her living men and women, "who chirp and chaffer, come and go for pleasure or profit," but also the spirits of the ancient masters, whose works lie neglected and dishonoured and falling into decay. If one searches for them in chapter-house or cloister-porch, in the church's apse, aisle, or nave, sometimes even in the dark crypt where one has to grope one's way by the light of a torch, everywhere there is the same neglect. The frescoes peel and drop, and no hand is held out

to arrest the decay; and all the time the shades of the wronged great souls look on in silence. To the common herd they are "Old Master This and Early the Other"; only the faithful few know that the old and the new are fellows and that these early painters, many of them unnamed and forgotten, did a work without which there would have been no Da Vinci, no Angelo, no Raphael:

"For oh, this world and the wrong it does!
They are safe in heaven with their backs to it,
The Michaels and Rafaels, you hum and buzz
Round the works of, you of little wit!
Do their eyes contract to the old world's scope,
Now that they see God face to face,
And have all attained to be poets, I hope?
'Tis their holiday now, in any case."

Much they reck of your praise and you!
But the wronged great souls—can they be quit
Of a world where their work is all to do,
. . . . . "

They linger round, not for the praise missed, but for the work undone. They had a message for the world; and can they rest until the world has heard it?

Their message was shortly this. "Greek Art ran and reached the goal." The Greeks depicted

the human form, body and soul united, in flawless perfection. So much was clear gain ;—

> " The truth of Man, as by God first spoken,
> Which the actual generations garble,
> Was re-uttered————"

But their art failed in that it took no account of the infinite. Its very perfection was the seal of its incompleteness, looked at in the light of absolute truth and beauty. It was perfect, therefore " the Artificer's hand was arrested ;" the avenues to further progress were closed. And all the time, lying above and beyond it, was that vast region of the unseen, which it could not touch. There was no mystery about this art. Perfection of outward form was something tangible, which the eye could estimate, the senses apprehend. The better thing beyond, which no eye can see, was only to be indicated by an art which would reach out through and above itself towards that which it could never hope adequately to represent. Thus Greek art led to nothing ; men, looking upon this perfection, were paralysed :—

> " So, you saw yourself as you wished you were,
> As you might have been, as you cannot be ;
> Earth here, rebuked by Olympus there ;
> And grew content with your poor degree,

With your little power, by those statues' godhead,
And your little scope, by their eyes' full sway,
And your little grace, by their grace embodied,
And your little date, by their forms that stay.

. . . . . .

So, testing your weakness by their strength,
Your meagre charms by their rounded beauty,
Measured by Art in your breadth and length,
You learned—to submit is a mortal's duty."

This was all that that period of Greek art could do for men,—show them perfection, make them feel how weak and imperfect they were, and how vain it was to aim at that which they could never attain to.

The change came when some one "turned his eyes inwardly one fine day, and cried with a start—'What if we so small be greater and grander the while than they?'" It was then that the early masters began to paint. They aimed at something far beyond the goal of Greek art, so far beyond that they never hoped to show it in its perfection; but they did accomplish this,—they brought "the invisible full into play;" at the same time that they painted, or aimed at painting, man as he was, not as he might have been. Their art was imperfect; but its very imperfection hinted at

something beyond, and growth again became possible. "To-day's brief passion seethes with the morrow" they could cry—

> "'Tis a lifelong toil till our lump be leaven—
> The better! What's come to perfection perishes.
> Things learned on earth we shall practice in heaven;
> Works done least rapidly, Art most cherishes."

And men, looking at their pictures, could see themselves as they were, no better, and yet with infinite possibilities suggested.

> "On which I conclude, that the early painters,
> To cries of 'Greek Art and what more wish you?'—
> Replied, 'To become now self-acquainters,
> 'And paint man, whatever the issue!
> 'Make new hopes shine through the flesh they fray,
> 'New fears aggrandize the rags and tatters:
> 'To bring the invisible full into play!
> 'Let the visible go to the dogs—what matters?'"

We cannot but feel that Browning's own view of the function of art in this respect largely coincides with that which he ascribes to the old masters, a view closely bound up with his philosophy of life as a whole. Art was to aim at that which it could not hope fully to accomplish. The higher the art, the more this held good, for the truer the truth that art was to interpret, the less was it possible to repre-

sent it in the concrete, and so it teaches as much by that which it leaves undone as by that which it does, always provided that it recognises and suggests the undone. An artist ought to choose rather to give inadequate expression to his highest conceptions than to represent in its perfection a lower conception. This is the view of art, with its corresponding view of life, to which Browning constantly recurs.

"——See thou applaud the great heart of the artist,
Who, examining the capabilities
Of the block of marble he has to fashion
Into a type of thought or passion,—
Not always, using obvious facilities,
Shapes it, as any artist can,
Into a perfect symmetrical man,
Complete from head to foot of the life-size,
Such as old Adam stood in his wife's eyes,—
But, now and then, bravely aspires to consummate
A Colossus by no means so easy to come at,
And uses the whole of his block for the bust,
Leaving the mind of the public to finish it,
Since cut it ruefully short he must:
On the face alone he expends his devotion,
He rather would mar than resolve to diminish it,
—Saying, 'Applaud me for this grand notion
'Of what a face may be! As for completing it
'In breast and body and limbs, do that, you!'"

This was the value of the mass of marble

bought by the speaker in *Fifine at the Fair* "for just ten dollars." To the world it was an "uncouth, unwieldy bulk," shapeless and meaningless; but to him it out-valued his Raphael as the diamond the pearl; for "one hand—the master's—smoothed and scraped that bulk," and to the seeing eye it gave subtle hints of what Michael Angelo's design had been,—"the creature, dear-divine, yet earthly —awful, too," the sea-goddess Eidothée. He, the man who possessed it, worked out in his soul of souls the whole design:—

"For, you must know, I too achieved Eidothée
In silence and by night—dared justify the lines
Plain to my soul . . . . .
If she stood forth at last, the Master was to thank!
Yet may there not have smiled approval in his eyes—
That one at least was left who, born to recognise
Perfection in the piece imperfect, worked that night,
In silence, such his faith, until the apposite
Design was out of him, truth palpable once more?
And then,—for at one blow its fragments strewed the floor,—
Recalled the same to live within his soul as heretofore."

In a strain half pathetic, half whimsical, Browning now goes on to reproach the Old Masters for numbering him among the unthinking crowd, who are too blind to recognise the value of their art; for would he not

willingly rescue their works from neglect, if they would only give him a hint where anything but frescoes was to be found. Not that he expects the greatest of them to deign to accept his homage. The great Ghirlandajo, Botticelli, Lippino, Frà Angelico, — he does not aspire to be recognised by these ;—

> "But are you too fine, Taddeo Gaddi,
> To grant me a taste of your intonaco,
> Some Jerome that seeks the heaven with a sad eye,
> Not a churlish saint, Lorenzo Monaco?"

Above all Giotto comes in for his share of the reproaches ; since he, at least, ought to have recognised Browning's long devotion. He can bear the slights of the others, but Giotto!

> "Giotto, how, with that soul of yours,
> Could you play me false who loved you so?"

Had he not searched everywhere for one piece of work of his in particular,—"a certain precious little tablet' Buonarroti eyed like a lover ;" and in the end some one else unearthed it? Why had not the ghost of Giotto spoken to him in time, and given him a hint?

He breaks off in a spirit prophetic and yet not prophetic, with an aspiration after a time

when, the Grand Duke having been driven from Florence, Florence shall be a republic once more. Then Florentines may

> "—— ponder, once Freedom restored to Florence,
> How art may return that departed with her."

Fra Lippo Lippi shows mediæval art in conflict with the growing spirit of the Renaissance. From insisting on the importance of representing spirit rather than matter, the later mediæval artists went on to neglect the body. This was the artistic milieu in which the painter-monk, Fra Lippino, found himself:

> "Your business is not to catch man with show,
> With homage to the perishable clay,
> But lift them over it, ignore it all,
> Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.
> Your business is to paint the souls of men—
> . . . . . .
> Give us no more of body than shows soul!
> Why put all thought of praise out of our head
> With wonder at lines, colours, and what not?
> Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!"

But it was not for nothing that Fra Lippo Lippi had spent eight years of his life in the streets. He had learned the look of things; and he loved to paint men and women just as he saw them, not disembodied spirits. Allowed to adorn his convent, he covers a cloister-wall

with a piece of surging life, in which monks of all kinds and colours, old women, little children, the murderer and the penitent, jostle one another. The monks, good simple souls, look and applaud. This is art which appeals to them. But the Prior and the men of the old school look grave and shake their heads:—"It's art's decline, my son," they say; "you're not of the true painters." He endeavours to conform himself and paint as he is bidden; but he chafes against painting "saints and saints and saints again," nothing more; while without a whole world of beauty and delight lies under his eyes,—the world!

> "The beauty and the wonder and the power,
> The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
> Changes, surprises,—and God made it all!"

How can he look upon the fair face of his own town of Florence, with

> "yonder river's line,
> The mountain round it, and the sky above,
> Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
> These are the frame to,"

and say that all this is to be despised and passed over? No,

> "The world and life's too big to pass for a dream."

This was the idea that he wanted to show forth in his painting:—

> "————paint these
> Just as they are, careless what comes of it;
> God's works—paint any one, and count it crime
> To let a truth slip."

And yet not altogether without idealising them; for he knows that the artist is the interpreter, not the brainless repeater of a message in the same language in which it has been committed to him; in particular when all can have the message in that language themselves first-hand. He knows that people understand things when painted, which they understand not at all when not painted. He will "lend his mind out" to help men to see that which they cannot see but for art; he will interpret; but he will interpret on no other principle than this,—

> "—— This world's no blot for us,
> Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good."

And he insists upon this, that the same God who made the soul made the body also; and that if the soul is to be revealed, it must be done in God's own way, by means of the body,

not in spite of it. It was false art by which men painted the body badly, in order that the eye, unable to rest there, must go on to find the soul. Men are less, not more, tempted to "take the film that's furled about a star for the star's self," the more the central glory permeates the film. The more beautiful the external world, the more is the inner soul of things revealed.

This poem carries with it a breezy rush of life, a *Lebensfreudigkeit* which breathes the very spirit of the Renaissance. But it would be a mistake to suppose that, because Fra Lippo Lippi protests against what was undoubtedly the overstraining of one side of art to the neglect of the other, his art was merely sensuous, or that his theory of art was one-sided. He combats this in characteristic words :—

> "Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn,
> Left foot and right foot, go a double step,
> Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,
> Both in their order?"

or if he does, for argument's sake,

> "——say there's beauty with no soul at all
> (I never saw it—put the case the same—)"

his allowing of the case in no way affects his own attitude,—"I never saw it."

No true artist ever did. For he knows that all beauty is but the robe of truth, that truth which looms large, formless, awful, before his eyes. Herself he cannot see; sometimes he only hears the rustle of the sweeping garment as she passes away beyond his sight; but he treasures up each glimpse of her in sky and sea, in tree and stream, in the faces of men and women. In everything that his eye rests upon, he sees some outward manifestation of her; and as he looks upon now one aspect, now another, now another, he seeks to embody the vision in forms that stay. Is his art perfect? Surely not. For he knows that he will never see the whole with mortal eyes :—

> "I thirst for truth,
> But shall not drink it till I reach the source."

And how powerless is his brush to represent even that which he does see! He must be satisfied if he can only show "some fragment, some slight sample of the prouder workmanship his own home boasts;" if his art can thus "show its birth was in a gentler clime;"

so that men, passing by, may reflect, before they depart, how splendid must be the treasure-house from which these are taken.

And, like the scribe, who is "well instructed unto the kingdom of heaven," he "bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." He is not careful lest one aspect of the truth should seem to run counter to another. That is truth's affair; his to see purely, and record faithfully. For the true artist there can be no possible opposition between the "real," so-called, and the "ideal;" for he knows that both,—the thing seen and the thing unseen,—are one.

ANDREA DEL SARTO.

"'Friend, there's a certain sorry little scrub
'Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how,
'Who, were he set to plan and execute
'As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,
'Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!'"

So said Michael Angelo, "his very self," one day to Raphael, while the latter was painting the frescoes in the Vatican, "flaming out his thoughts upon a palace wall for Rome to see," uplifted in soul. And the "sorry little scrub," who could rival, nay, out-rival the great master, was Andrea del Sarto, called "the faultless painter." Such, at least, is the popular story which Browning rescues from neglect, and by which he emphasises still further that which he puts forward all through in his sketch, that the failure of Andrea del Sarto to reach the highest rank among painters was the failure of

one who could have attained, not that of one who was shut out by the limitations of his genius.

Andrea Vanucchi, commonly known as Andrea del Sarto (the tailor's Andrew), was born in Florence about the year 1488, and died in 1530, ten years after the death of Raphael. He drew his first inspirations from his studies of the pictures of Maraccio and Guirlandajo, of Leonardo and Michael Angelo; and early showed conspicuous talent in draughtsmanship, treatment of colour, light and shade, and all the technique of the art. He possessed an extraordinary facility for copying. We read that one copy that he made of a celebrated picture, Raphael's portrait of Leo X., deceived even the man who had painted most of the accessories, draperies, background, &c., himself. But his original pictures as well showed unusual power. Concerning one, a picture of the Last Supper, which he painted for the monastery of the Salvi, Lanzi tells the story of how "at the siege of Florence, in 1529, the soldiers, after having assailed the suburbs of the city, where the convent was situated, and destroyed the church and part of the monastery, on approach-

ing the refectory, were so struck with the impressive beauty of this painting, that they remained motionless, and had not the heart to demolish it; imitating on that occasion the conduct of Demetrius, who, at the siege of Rhodes, respected only the paintings of Protogenes." The artist who could move men thus can hardly have been a mere clever draughtsman. Yet it is certain that his pictures fall far below the works of those painters of whom he seems by natural endowments to have been the peer. A biographer, writing in the beginning of the present century, gives us the following estimate of his art:—"His design is correct, and partakes of the style of M. Angelo; his compositions are agreeable, and his ordonnances are arranged with judgment. . . . His colouring is distinguished by the suavity and harmony of his tones; his pencil is full and flowing; and he has perhaps never been surpassed in the boldness of his relief, or his perfect knowledge of the chiar-oscuro;" but the same writer adds, "He wanted that sacred fire which animates the great poet and the painter, and inspires them with their noblest and boldest conceptions." At the age of twenty-four he married Lucrezia

del Fede, a woman whose extreme beauty lives to-day on many of his canvases, and who was his evil genius all through life. From this time onwards there seems to have been a struggle between two opposing forces in his life,—his art which pointed him upwards, and his wife who dragged him down; and the victory remained with her. His golden chance came when Francis I. called him to his court; and there, in the warmth of the great monarch's smile, it seemed as if he could at last "leave the ground, put on the glory;" but he was called back to Florence by his wife, and the avenues to further progress were closed for ever. He left Fontainebleau with the promise to return again, Francis having entrusted him with money for the purchase of works of art in Italy, which he was to bring back with him. But once again in Florence, he forgot art, forgot honour, forgot even common honesty. He appropriated this money to his own use, and return to France was now impossible. From this time onward he sank lower and lower, falling more and more under the influence of his wife, and painting only such pictures as would bring

in ready gain. He died while comparatively young, in extreme poverty, deserted by the woman for whom he had sacrificed art and life alike.

Andrea del Sarto had fallen on what were for him evil days. The great Renaissance was in full swing; the pioneers had done their work; and now it was for the rank and file to follow on into the breach, and along the path that they had opened out. Early as it was, signs were not wanting that pointed to that thraldom in which the great Raphael was to hold the world for three hundred years after his death. Signs of the method of Raphael becoming stereotyped into a set of dogmas, and of the evolution of a school after his manner, were springing up. And Andrea del Sarto, with his fatal facility of execution, found that he could paint pictures that pleased and sold, while working upon other men's lines, the "fundamental brain-work" absent.

But it was reserved for Browning to bring out the full pathos of all that this story implies; Browning, whose especial good gift it is to be able to breathe on the dry bones

of facts and make them live. He who, from the bald records of an old murder case, could evolve a Caponsacchi, a Pompilia, and an Innocent XII., such as he presents him, now breathes upon Vasari's biography, and the man lives before us.

And it is an achievement peculiar to Browning's self, that, in giving us this picture of a man without a moral backbone, yet, so just is his estimate of him, so large and generous his view of human nature at its weakest, that the man is one to whom our heart goes out in pity, not one from whom we shrink back in contempt. And this in spite of the fact that the moral failure is placed in the most striking light, and that it is failure which Browning's individual bent would cause him to place in the category of sins of the most deadly class; for is it not the deliberate turning away from the light of a man to whom light has been given, until at last the moral nature is so weakened that a turning back is impossible? But the man is generous, gentle, and lovable. His love for Lucrezia is not all passion of the lower kind; it is full of tender making allowances, bearing with

excusing. Throughout it is the infinite pathos, the unutterable sadness of sin that oppresses us.

The picture is extraordinarily vivid. We see the man and the woman as they sit hand in hand in "the melancholy little house" they "built to be so gay with," built with the gold of the French King; we catch the twilight atmosphere of the whole; we feel the settled, hopeless melancholy of the man, a melancholy with which he has even ceased to struggle; all around seems to exhale a sigh in sympathy with that which goes up from his own soul:—

> "A common greyness silvers everything,—
> All in a twilight . . . . . .
> . . . . . .
> My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down,
> To yonder sober, pleasant Fiesole.
> There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;
> That length of convent-wall across the way
> Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
> The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,
> And autumn grows, autumn in everything."

"My youth, my hope, my art," what volumes does this speak! He is only thirty-seven years old; yet his life is practically over. All striving is over; he has failed, and he rests

upon failure. And this is the painter whom men call faultless:—

> "I can do with my pencil what I know,
> What I see, what at bottom of my heart
> I wish for, if I ever wish so deep—
> Do easily too—when I say, perfectly,
> I do not boast, perhaps: . . .
> I do what many dream of, all their lives,
> —Dream? strive to do, and agonise to do
> And fail in doing."

But his excelling is the seal of his failure; for in conception, in effort, in true artistic fire, he has failed, failed with his eyes straight turned to the light. Is his work perfect? but why? Because he pitches his conception low; because he "seeks a little thing to do, sees it and does it;" chooses always a task well within his grasp. "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp." Did he but seek to express the highest conception that his inner soul of souls was capable of; had he, like Raphael, reached out, "that Heaven might so replenish him, above and through his art," then his execution, like Raphael's, would indeed have given way; but "the play, the insight, the stretch" would have been all his. As it is, he, whose eye for form is so true

that he can correct the faults in Raphael's work, never deceives himself as to his true place and rank. He knows that work perfect in the way that his is perfect means artistic failure; nay, further, that artistic success such as his is means moral failure; and that he falls far below, not alone Raphael and his compeers, but also many unnamed artists whose works have come to nothing, and who in actual achievement have done so much less than he :—

> "So much less!
> Well, less is more, Lucrezia, I am judged.
> There burns a truer light of God in them,
> In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
> Heart, or whate'er else, than goes to prompt
> This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.
> Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,
> Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,
> Enter and take their place there, sure enough,
> Though they come back and cannot tell the world.
> My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here."

Why is it? Why, with so true an insight into what constitutes high work and low, does he conceive inferior work? For the extremity of the pathos is not in the artistic failure in itself, but in the lost possibilities. If he were merely a correct, soulless painter, there would be no cause for regret; but, as when we turn

from Millais' *Carpenter's Shop* or his *Isabella* to his later work—his portraits of fashionable ladies or over-dressed children,—here, too, we can only exclaim with Othello, "But the pity of it! oh, the pity of it!" And for Andrea del Sarto the lowest, saddest depth of all is touched in his acceptance of all this, his resignation. He is satisfied; he no longer even struggles. To the saddest, most hopeless words of all—words that speak of final, unalterable failure in him to reach the place meant for him by God, he adds, "As I choose." Truly this is twilight, a twilight that carries with it a promise of blackest midnight.

The main cause of all lies in this fact,—he loves unworthily. In that which, of all things in life, ought to have led him upwards, he finds that which weighs him down. He himself disclaims the idea of placing the cause here. Lucrezia, it is true, "does not understand nor care to understand about his art;" but "Why do I need you?" he asks himself—

> "———incentives come from the soul's self;
> What wife had Rafael, or has Agnolo?"

And further Lucrezia had brought to him all

that he had demanded of her; "the perfect brow, the perfect eyes, the more than perfect mouth, the low voice," were all his. This he had required of her; this she gave him. Why blame Lucrezia? He does not blame her. And yet when, as on this night, the full consciousness arises in him of what might have been for him and his art, the regret will come:—

> "Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind!
> Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged
> 'God and the glory! never care for gain.
> 'The present by the future, what is that?
> 'Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo!
> 'Rafael is waiting: up to God, all three!'"

and he knows that the golden gates are closed to him because he has linked his soul to that which cannot enter in with him.

It was in vain that he tried to separate his life into two distinct parts, his love on the one hand, his soul's true striving on the other, and to say,—"I will love unworthily, but I will work worthily." For, in the ordinary life of every day, these two, which one may try to keep apart, and which are indeed one, meet and take hands, no matter how low the love, no matter how high the work; and how

much more true in this when a man's work is art, which is all love, love operative on things seen. Carlyle has said:—"You may see how a man would fight by the way in which he sings;" of Andrea del Sarto it might be said,—"You may see how he paints by the way in which he loves." And this is apart from the actual practical hindrances that beset him. Vasari tells us that he was compelled to paint pictures that would pay, not alone, as many an artist to-day does, as pot-boilers, but to satisfy his wife; for the lovely face that looks out upon us from more than one picture of the Madonna, veiled a spirit that was sordid and grovelling; the hand which holds the divine child, that "soft hand," "a woman of itself," is the same that was held out to receive the price of his betrayed art. Browning indicates this:—

> "I'll work for your friend's friend, never fear,
> Treat his own subject after his own way,
> Fix his own time, accept too his own price,
> And shut the money into this small hand
> When next it takes mine."

For, although he is doing inferior work, he is

working and working hard. One of the most touching points in Browning's sketch is the weariness of the man, joined to his conscious failure. He is spent in doing that which he knows to be of no true value. The irony of fate is shown in this, that he was exceptionally prolific in production. He has not failed from having let all his gifts lie fallow, like Aprile and Sordello; he has rather made the opposite mistake,—produced and produced abundantly. "Some good son paint my two hundred pictures—let him try!" he exclaims, with the only touch of bitterness in the whole, when he is reminded that he allowed his father and mother to die of want. To the reader there is a touch of infinite sadness in the cry; for, although the prostitution of genius is worse than the wasting of it, yet work is work; and the weariness of the worn-out worker appeals to the broad human instincts of us all, quite apart from the end aimed at. Yet it is true that, for Andrea del Sarto, his pictures will buy Lucrezia's smiles, and so he paints:—

> "While hand and eye and something of a heart
> Are left me, work's my ware, and what's it worth?
> I'll pay my fancy."

She shall have "the thirteen scudi for the ruff;" her cousin's debts shall be paid. But an influence in the wrong direction assuming a definite form like this, that could be seized and grappled with, was one that any man is able to combat; while who can fight against the air he breathes? The physical frame that can resist a blow or a sword-thrust, will succumb in the end to a subtle poison that daily, hourly creeps into the blood. Lucrezia created around her an atmosphere in which no high aspirations, no unselfish strivings could live, and this was the atmosphere that he breathed. And so his moral energies had gradually slackened; and little by little he had lost grip upon life and art. It was not the absence of incentive; it was the active deadening influence of her companionship.

And what he might have done and been, had his life been rounded off and complete, is not hidden from him:—

> "Had I been two, another and myself,
> Our head would have o'erlooked the world!"

Could he have said of love—

> "I'll take his hand and go with him
> To the deep wells of light,"

whither, one asks, might not that hand have led him? Surely as far as the great throne itself, whence all life springs, and round which all life gathers. All this he knows and feels. How he recalls that golden time at the French court—

> "That Francis, that first time,
> And that long festal year at Fontainebleau!
> I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
> Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
> In that humane great monarch's golden look,—
> One finger in his beard or twisted curl
> Over his good mouth's mark that made the smile,
> One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
> The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
> I painting proudly with his breath on me,
> All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
> Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls
> Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts."

But in the midst of all this the voice called him,

> "— the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
> The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare;"

and he put off the glory, followed and sinned.

And he is resigned. If, on this evening, he does go back in imagination to what might have been,—

> "Only let me sit
> The grey remainder of the evening out,
> Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly

How I could paint, were I but back in France,
One picture, just one more—the Virgin's face,
Not yours this time!"—

it is as an idle fancy, no more. He knows that it is all far behind him, the die is irrevocably cast :—

"'Tis done and past; 'twas right, my instinct said;
Too live the life grew, golden and not grey,
And I'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.
How could it end in any other way?"

A kind of fatalistic mood possesses him this evening as he looks back upon the past :—

"— the whole seems to fall into a shape
As if I saw alike my work and self
And all that I was born to be and do,
A twilight piece. Love, we are in God's hand,
How strange now looks the life he makes us lead;
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!
I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie!"

What moral opiate, one asks, has he been taking which has power to bind and deaden his spirit to this point?

And even after death there is still failure; for at the parting of the ways that lead to light and to darkness, the angel with the flaming

sword that turned every way stands guarding the way to the tree of life; and the face is the face of Lucrezia :—

> "Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,
> Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
> For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo, and me
> To cover— . . . . ."

but

> "still they overcome
> Because there's still Lucrezia."

CHRISTMAS EVE.

IN *Christmas Eve* Browning passes in review three distinct developments of Christianity in our own day; and has much to say on the great question of Christianity itself in its fundamental idea. There is an entire absence of theological argument on any of the burning questions which gather round this fundamental idea, such as one would expect at first sight on finding oneself carried from Zion Chapel on the one hand to St. Peter's at Rome on the other, and then again to the lecture-room of a German sceptic. But, at the start, the speaker of the monologue, who looks at the whole subject from the standpoint of the Christian, in telling us how he arrived at this standpoint, brings us face to face with the stupendous question,—did the Godhead take flesh?

A fitting introduction to the whole subject is the passage in Section V. in which he deals with the grounds of his own faith. Here, while alone on the common with God and nature, he worships God, apart, it is true, from any Christian body, but as a Christian, as one who believes in the God-man; and looking back, he reviews the different stages through which his mind had passed before he reached this point. His conviction is based on the acceptance without question of two facts,—the existence of God and the power of God; and in what follows it is to the moral rather than to the intellectual argument that the main appeal is made; but although the conclusion is not,—nor does it profess to be,—logically argued out, it is nevertheless thoroughly thought out in its intellectual as well as in its moral bearings. Starting from the assumption that God *is* and God *can*, he arrives in the end, by a chain of thought to him inevitable, at Christ.

Whether the speaker expresses the ideas of Browning himself must remain more or less of an open question. In a dramatic monologue one must begin by assuming that the poet aims at

giving us the ideas and feelings of the character which he personates for the time; but when we find the same ideas expressed more than once by widely different characters, the conclusion is not very far-fetched that here at least he is either deliberately expressing his own thoughts, or that unconsciously his own individual bent is showing through. Further, in *Christmas Eve*, the speaker is not a well-known character with well-known opinions. When Caliban or Don Juan speak, we feel bound to assume, if possible, that the monologue is dramatic in effect as well as in name; but here the speaker, a kind of floating entity, with no antecedents and no history, is committed by his past to no especial criticism of life and faith. The chief corner-stone in his structure, this argument from the power to the love of God, is at least a favourite one with Browning; and it is not alone in *Christmas Eve* that the thought is carried one step further. The power of God, this fact, proves the love of God; the love of God culminates, must culminate in Christ. This is very fully worked out in *Saul*. When once we admit the all-powerfulness of God we are face to face with this problem,—is God superior to

us in all else, and shall the meanest of His creatures teach Him, be superior to Him in this one point, shall the creature love, the Creator not love?

"Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ultimate gift,
That I doubt his own love shall compete with it? Here the parts shift?
Here the creature surpass the Creator, the end what Began?"

This he finds impossible of belief. That man loves, this fact, is a proof to him that God must love infinitely. And does God love? Then God will surely do for his creature what even man, if he had the power, would do for his fellow-man, if he loved him. It is on this plea that David challenges the love of God to interfere on the behalf of Saul:—

"Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this man,
And dare doubt he alone shall not help him, who yet alone can?
Would it ever have entered my mind, the bare will, much less power,
To bestow on this Saul what I sang of, the marvellous dower
Of the life he was gifted and filled with? to make such a soul,
Such a body, and then such an earth for insphering the whole?
And doth it not enter my mind (as my warm tears attest)
These good things being given, to go on, and give one more, the best?
Ay, to save and redeem and restore him, maintain at the height

This perfection,—succeed with life's dayspring death's minute of night?

. . . . . .

'Tis the weakness in strength that I cry for, my flesh that I seek
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, shall it be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by for ever: a Hand like my hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!"

Karshish gives the converse when he, supposing for the moment that God did take flesh and dwell among us, deduces from this,—"So the All-Great were the All-Loving too."

Now, on this Christmas Eve, the speaker tells us that his soul had long since brought all to this single test:—

"That he, the eternal First and Last,
Who, in his power, had so surpassed
All man conceives of what is might,—
Whose wisdom, too, showed infinite,
—Would prove as infinitely good;
Would never (my soul understood),
With power to work all love desires,
Bestow e'en less than man requires;
That he who endlessly was teaching,
Above my spirit's utmost reaching,
What love can do in the leaf or stone,
(So that to master this alone,
This done in the leaf or stone for me,
I must go on learning endlessly)

Would never need that I, in turn,
Should point him out defect unheeded,
And show that God had yet to learn
What the meanest human creature needed,
—Not life, to wit, for a few short years,
Tracking his way through doubts and fears,
While the stupid earth on which I stay
Suffers no change, but passive adds
Its myriad years to myriads,
Though I, he gave it to, decay,
Seeing death come and choose about me,
And my dearest ones depart without me.
No: love which, on earth, amid all the shows of it,
Has ever been seen the sole good of life in it,
The love ever growing there, spite of the strife in it,
Shall arise, made perfect, from death's repose of it."

Human love calls out aloud for a God who loves; and this love of God is found in Christ. This, the speaker tells us, he has long since decided for himself. The question is closed; and in all that follows, his attitude is that of the Christian. When Christ appears to him, it is not as a stranger, but as one whom he has always known; even his garment has "a hem he can recognise;" when he speaks to him it is to say:—

"Thou art the love of God,—above
His power didst hear me place his love,
And that was leaving the world for thee.
Therefore thou must not turn from me,
As I had chosen the other part!"

and again :—

> " I have looked to thee from the beginning,
> Straight up to thee through all the world."

He represents himself as estimating the worship at Zion Chapel and at St. Peter's justly only when in the shadow of the presence of Christ ; with him he can enter the professor's lecture-room ; while he holds to the garment of Christ he is right ; when he lets it go, he is wrong.

His classification of all those who, by any stretching of the term, can be called Christians ;—although to some of them he only grants the name in the indulgent spirit in which he would allow a child to think, when he rides a stick, that the stick carries him,—seems to be,—Catholics and not Catholics, the latter divided again into—those who look upon Christ as God, and those who look upon him as a mere man. This fairly well corresponds to the three classes given, if we remember that in each case the extreme type only is taken ;—Roman Catholicism, as the extremest development of Catholicism ; Zion Chapel community, in which all the most prominent

features of nonconformity are brought forward; the professor's lecture-room, in which the least possible shred of honour is paid to Christ. With not all Catholics does "the head swim;" not all nonconformist ministers are endowed with "immense stupidity;" not all those who have honest doubts as to the divinity of Christ have worn down the figure to the mere shadow which is all that the "virgin-minded" professor leaves us. The Greek Church; the Anglican Church; all the different developments of nonconformity; all the finely graduated shades of doubt through which we may pass, from the so-called broad views of the mild agnostic, down to the attitude of the professor, are passed over, and find no special mention, because each may be placed in one or other of the three classes. It is true that the special place of one or another in the category is often a matter of keen discussion, and possibly the line is not always easy to draw; but a line there is; and the extreme type seems to have been selected—with doubtful justice, many of us may think—as pointing the moral best.

We enter Zion Chapel first; and here no

touch is spared that can call up before us a vivid picture in which all the most repellent features of nonconformity are brought forward. We hear the creak of the door-hinge; we see the splutter of "the single tallow candle in the cracked square lantern;" we note the congregation arrive one by one; "the fat weary woman," "the many-tattered little old-faced peaking sister-turned-mother," the "female something," with lips too white and cheeks too red, the "tall yellow man, like the Penitent Thief," the "shoemaker's lad, with wizened face in want of soap." All this, with "the hot smell and the human noises," unrelieved squalor and vulgarity, is the setting which forms a background to all the worst points in the system.

First there is the exclusiveness of the sect, in virtue of which they, "taking God's word under wise protection, correct its tendency to diffusiveness;" for although the little chapel rejoices in the name of Mount Zion, to which, the prophet tells us, "all flesh shall come," yet there is "a something—a motion they style the Call of them," without which none can claim fellowship with them, and yet which

the world outside with its teeming millions knows nothing of. The speaker sits an alien among the elect. Next there is the overwhelming predominance of the personality of the "preaching-man," who feeds his flock with just that diet, and no other, which he has found, or rather believes that he has found, suitable to himself:—

> "—a patchwork of chapters and texts in severance,
> . . . . . .
> Having clothed his own soul with, he'd fain see
> equipped yours,
> So tossed you again your Holy Scriptures."

Next, and as a result of this, there is the distortion of the truth, not alone from misrepresentation, but from partial representation. There is as much good as ill in the sermon; but even the very truths are false "in their quaint presentment;"

> "How could you know them, grown to double their size
> In the natural fog of the good man's mind,
> Like yonder spots of our roadside lamps,
> Haloed about with the common's damps?"

Thus, in his wholly arbitrary interpretation, does he, "in fine irreverence . . . hug the

book of books to pieces." All this, however, might have been borne, had it not been for the complacency of the flock, none of whom seemed to find any fault with the spiritual diet supplied them. They sat on "divinely flustered," no one

> "Appeared to suspect that the preacher's labours
> Were help that the world could be saved without."

He flung out of the little chapel.

What a deep breath we draw when we find ourselves in the open again, and drink in deep draughts of the fresh, cool, night air! From the literary point of view this is one of the best passages in the poem. The change of subject is marked by a change in the form; and in the next section, the jolting, irregular metre and strange, almost grotesque rhymes have given place to a measure which is dignified and rhythmical, and a diction which rises higher in proportion as a higher note is struck. There is a lull in the storm; and we see the sky with its "ramparted cloud-prison" on the one side, while the "empty other half" seems in silence to know that the moon may appear at any time. "How this outside was

pure and different!" The speaker feels as if, God speeding him, he was entering his church-door now, nature leading him:—

> "——— Oh, let men keep their ways
> Of seeking thee in a narrow shrine—
> Be this my way! And this is mine!"

In seeming confirmation of this choice is vouchsafed to him there and then, to him, "one out of a world of men, singled forth," the unique and superb spectacle of the lunar rainbow. We, who only read, are almost as much rapt in the wonder of the sight as the speaker himself, so masterly is the description, in its rugged strength, its few rapid clear-cut strokes, and its power of taking possession of one, a power that clings to the words of one who sees. Climbing the arch we soar upward,—upward, until at last—

> "—— supreme the spectral creature lorded
> In a triumph of whitest white——"

We gaze with upturned eyes, "glutted with glory," when all at once, sudden as a thunder-bolt, there is a pause, a stop—

> "All at once I looked up with terror,
> He was there.
> He himself with his human air.

On the narrow pathway, just before.

. . . . . .

I felt no terror; no surprise;
My mind filled with the cataract,
At one bound of the mighty fact.
'I remember, he did say
'Doubtless that, to this world's end,
'Where two or three should meet and pray,
'He would be in the midst, their friend;
'Certainly he was there with them!'
And my pulses leaped for joy
Of the golden thought without alloy,
That I saw his very vesture's hem."

But this is soon followed by "a fresh enhancing shiver of fear." Can Christ remain with him, with him who has despised his friends? Every other question now recedes into the background; he only knows—He was there, they are his friends, they love. The crust of outward circumstances falls off like a garment, and this one golden fact alone remains. Henceforth, fast holding to the vesture of Christ, he will follow whither he is led, nor shall he again be found to despise those who love him.

He next finds himself before St. Peter's at Rome, rapt in the wonder of the fabric:—

"Is it really on the earth,
This miraculous Dome of God?

Has the angel's measuring-rod
Which numbered cubits, gem from gem,
'Twixt the gates of the new Jerusalem,
Meted it out,—and what he meted,
Have the sons of men completed?
—Binding ever as he bade,
Columns on the colonnade
With arms wide open to embrace
The entry of the human race
To the breast of . . . what is it, yon building,
Ablaze in front, all paint and gilding,
With marble for brick, and stones of price
For garniture of the edifice?"

It is the midnight mass of the Feast of the Nativity. Within the whole Basilica is alive:—

"Men in the chancel, body, and nave,
Men on the pillars' architrave,
Men on the statues, men on the tombs,
With popes and kings in their porphyry wombs."

We see the gorgeous ritual; we feel the thrill that runs through the immense concourse of people as the rapturous moment of "the main altar's consummation" approaches. "The taper-fires pant up," the incense suspires in clouds, the organ "holds his breath, . . . as if God's hushing finger grazed him," at the silver bell's tinkling,

"Quick cold drops of terror sprinkling
On sudden pavement strewed

With faces of the multitude,
Earth breaks up, time drops away,
In flows heaven with its new day
Of endless life, when He who trod,
Very man and very God,
This earth in weakness, shame and pain,
Dying the death whose signs remain
Up yonder on the accursed tree,—
Shall come again, no more to be
Of captivity the thrall,
But the one God, All in all,
King of kings, and Lord of lords,
As his servant John received the words,
'I died, and live for evermore!'"

And yet the ritual repels him. It seems to him to be the—

"——soul's too-much presuming
To turn the frankincense's fuming
And vapours of the candle starlike
Into the cloud her wings she buoys on."

He is experiencing the power that ritual possesses of repelling those to whom its true inwardness is a sealed book. He does not even dare to enter, so strongly does he believe that this is the intoxication of the senses. Further he believes that if from the summit of the fabric judgment were to drop her "damning plummet", a fatal space would be shown between it and the founder's base.

But his experience on the breezy common under God's own heaven now stands him in good stead. He will not repeat the mistake that he has made in the chapel :—

> "I see the error,—but above
> The scope of error, see the love."

And now comes over him in a great wave a sense of the love and devotion, the simplicity and the faith of those early Christian days ; when the Church, one with herself, cast her all at the feet of her one Lord :—

> "Oh love of those first Christian days !
> —Fanned so soon into a blaze,
> From the spark preserved by the trampled sect,
> That the antique sovereign Intellect
> Which then sat ruling in the world,
> Like a change in dreams, was hurled
> From the throne he reigned upon :
> You looked up, and he was gone.
> Gone, his glory of the pen !
> . . . . . .
> Gone, his pride of sculptor, painter !
> . . . . . .
> Gone, music too !
> . . . . . .
> What ? with all Rome here, whence to levy
> Such contribution to their appetite,
> With men and women in a gorgeous bevy,
> They take, as it were, a padlock, clap it tight
> On their southern eyes, restrained from feeding

On the glories of their ancient reading,
On the beauties of their modern singing,
On the wonders of the builder's bringing,
On the majesties of Art around them,—
And all these loves, late struggling incessant,
When faith has at last united and bound them,
They offer up to God for a present."

This passage, recalling as it does certain well-known stanzas in Arnold's *Obermann Once More*, while it has not the same classical ring, makes us realise even more forcibly—

"————-the wave
Of love which set so deep and strong
From Christ's then open grave;"

possibly for this reason, that whereas the love in Arnold's poem finds its power in the emptiness of life without it, the love here wells up strong and inevitable from the fountainhead of love itself. In the one, men, sick at heart, turned to the open grave of Christ from the extremity of their need; in the other, Christ is the one Lord of life for all.

With this quickened sense of the love which has built up the fabric, the giddy summit as well as the rock-firm base, the speaker is lifted into another plane. He who has still hesitated to enter even after he admits that

"their faith's heart beats," and that in spite of the error truth is there, now yields to this last test, which seems to him to be the supreme, the all-important one. He cannot turn away from—

> "So many species of one genus,
> All with foreheads bearing *lover*
> Written above the earnest eyes of them."

He only asks,—is Christ there? do they love? Christ has entered; he will enter too.

His tolerance is brought to the rudest test of all when he finds himself next outside the door of the lecture-hall of a college in some old German university town. Here he listens to the Christmas Eve discourse of the professor, who, inquiring into the Christ-myth, leads his hearers to the conclusion that, although the story is, of course, wholly untrustworthy, "since plainly no such life was liveable," and although Christ was not what he asserted he was, or what his followers, in their simplicity, said he asserted he was, still, taking the popular story as it stands, "when reason has strained and abated it of foreign matter," it seems clear that some man did live who gave rise to the fable, and that he was "a right true

man,—whose work was well worthy a man's endeavour;" and he recommends them to go home, and to venerate and adore all that is left of him. Surely Christ will not enter or bid the speaker enter here. In Zion Chapel or in St. Peter's the air may have been poisoned; but this man was leaving no air to poison. He cannot be required to enter the exhausted air-bell of the critic. Besides he challenges the consistency of the professor. If Christ was only a mere man, why is he to be worshipped? For his superior intellect? for his superior goodness? Honoured? yes; but worshipped? Can he be worshipped on any other plea but that he differed in kind and not merely in degree from other men? Christ, so he judges, is not to be worshipped because he was omniscient, while we only know in part, or because he was perfectly good, while the best of us sins. However great his superiority in these two points might have been, still he was nothing that we are not *to a certain extent.* Take the first,—his intellect. Why should this make him an object of worship? since he has told us nothing in the sphere of morality which

has not been told us also elsewhere, by manifold voices ;—

> "With this advantage that the stater
> Made nowise the important stumble
> Of adding, he, the sage and humble,
> Was also one with the Creator."

"Christ's goodness, then, does that fare better?" Was it self-acquired or the gift of God? Now, if the distinction between right and wrong were wholly arbitrary; if Christ had invented goodness, as the alphabet was invented; and if he had given us the virtues new, each with its proper name, the case would have been different; but the fact is that what he has told us of right or wrong is appraised by us only and when it finds an answer in our own consciences. It is true that he first brought to light virtues not looked upon as virtues before, and that he enlightens the conscience; but the light does not create the objects that it illumines. If, on the other hand, his goodness came from God, then he is as other men. Christians will willingly rob Christ of the lesser glory to crown him with the greater. His especial

work is not to make us know what is good, since—

> "—— the truth in God's breast
> Lies trace for trace upon ours impressed:
> Though he so bright and we so dim,
> We are made in his image to witness him—;"

it is rather to enable us to do it. "'Tis one thing to know, and another to practise," are the homely words in which Browning indicates this prime need of humanity. Light is indeed good; but life is what we want; and the true God-function is to give us the power to be that which conscience tells us we ought to be. This neither he who excels in intellect, nor he who excels in goodness,—neither the sage nor the saint, can do for us; but only He who can say,—

> "Believe in me,
> "Who lived and died, yet essentially
> "Am Lord of Life."

and therefore we look

> "—— from the gift to the giver,
> And from the cistern to the river,
> And from the finite to infinity,
> And from man's dust to God's divinity."

But even into the professor's lecture-room

Christ goes; for the lecturer must have some instinct that rises above his "loveless learning," since he exhorts his hearers to "go home and venerate this myth;" and there is, after all, a certain merit in his turning his attention to the subject at all. The speaker has now learned his lesson of tolerance. In his next mood he reflects that there is no use in any "further tracking and trying and testing." He will cultivate "a value for religion's self, a carelessness about the sects of it;" and practise "a mild indifferentism." "This tolerance is a genial mood!" he is reflecting, when he is rudely awakened from this pleasant sense of repose by a renewal of the storm; and he sees the vesture of Christ receding further and further into the distance. Christ has left him.

Then he realises that it is those who are indifferent who have no part or lot with Christ; that for each there must be "one way, our chief, best way of worship;" and that he must strive to find it. He believes that—

> "——God, by God's own ways occult,
> May—doth, I will believe,—bring back
> All wanderers to a single track;"

but that meantime he, the speaker, can only

know for himself. God, he believes, speaks to each individual soul. What is a message to one means nothing to another,—

> "Where one heard noise, and one saw flame,
> I only knew he named my name."

In the same way other men around him see many things that are a blank to him; but—

> "— What boots it, while yon lucid way,
> Loaded with stars, divides the vault?"

And so he chooses.

It is remarkable that the plea for each of the three classes reviewed that he puts forward is in no case that which they themselves would have urged. The strongest arguments in favour of nonconformity,—the open Bible, the freedom of the individual, the so-called personal religion,—all are passed over, and the worth of the system is brought to the one test,—are they His friends? do they love? In the same way the claims of Catholicism,—the divine origin, the witness of the ages, the inflexible clinging to the faith once given, no matter how overlarded it may be in some communions, the

continual refusal to take any one man's opinion as to truth,—all is ignored, and one plea towers above every other,—they love. Even with regard to the professor we find the same. All that can be said in favour of free-thought is ignored,—the honest search for the light, the struggle to be true to the intellect which no one but God has given us, the devotion to learning of this particular "sallow, virgin-minded studious martyr to mild enthusiasm," who is worn in body in the search after truth, having "kept his mind free from the fleshly taint." The chief plea put forward for him is that he does,—well, not love, but that he does admit that Christ was "a right true man":—

> "Oh, let me at lowest sympathise
> With the lurking drop of blood that lies
> In the desiccated brain's white roots,
> Without a throb for Christ's attributes,
> As the lecturer makes his special boast!
> If love's dead there, it has left a ghost."

It is for the sake of this "ghost" that the professor is tolerated.

That the choice in the end fall upon Zion Chapel is a foregone conclusion, and one in which no question of doctrine has any

part. He has just been insisting upon this, that God speaks to each individual soul singly and that the prime duty of each man is to read well "the sole book unsealed to him." The Catholic, on the other hand, holds that the book may be sealed or unsealed, but that it is at best insufficient and untrustworthy; that one may be mistaken about a revelation to the individual, coming, as it does, not directly, but through the individuality, which is an uncertain and varying quantity, affected by many extraneous circumstances, but not about a revelation to a divinely-founded body which Christ has promised to be with always. This is one of the *raisons d'être* of the Catholic Church. If the speaker rejects this principle, as many in whom the individual light is exceptionally bright, and for whom the starry way athwart the vault is exceptionally lucid, are sometimes, for an obvious reason, led to do, he must, of necessity, if he chooses at all, choose Zion Chapel and not St. Peter's at Rome; and he chooses it, not for that which it is, but for that which it is not.

Two points he is emphatic upon; a man must be tolerant, but he must not be indifferent; he must be quite sure for himself and not think

one way as good as another; and he must at at the same time honour the feeblest spark of truth in others. Even the professor is not excluded from the circle of his wide-reaching charity; although the blessing wherewith he blesses him is certainly not what he, the professor, would have chosen; for he prays that, in the dusk of his life:—

> "When thicker and thicker the darkness fills
> The world through his misty spectacles,
> And he gropes for something more substantial
> Than a fable, a myth or personification,—
> May Christ do for him what no mere man shall,
> And stand confessed as the God of salvation!"

THE END.

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